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EDITORIAL

GOING BEYOND EDSA: A CALL TO ALL POPULAR FORCES

The huge crowds, the stirring acts of courage, the fervor of a glorious cause and the euphoria of victory over a hated tyrant have long been gone. But three years after, so have the hopes and dreams for democracy and a better life that the people asserted at EDSA and expected to be fulfilled upon the overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship.

This year's celebration of the anniversary of the people's uprising at EDSA was a symbol of hopes trampled and dreams thwarted by those who rode on the crest of the people's struggle and took power in their name. The popular spirit and message of EDSA, with all its revolutionary implications, were buried in an avalanche of mystifying, religious themes.

The former crusader in yellow, Corazon Aquino, made a speech that contained nothing of significance. Seemingly oblivious that she had to make an accounting of how her government had lived up to the great expectations at EDSA, she regaled the audience with tales of her Japan trip and dwelt on trivial issues like her quarrels with Congress.

The millions of people of three years ago and the hundreds of thousands of earlier celebrations had dwindled to a pitiful crowd of 30,000, enticed mainly by the cheap, escapist entertainment that was offered.

Those who had fought and labored during the darkest years of fascist rule to make the victory possible were conspicuously absent. The day before, 20,000 of them, representing the militant organizations of the masses, had demonstrated at Mendiola to dramatize their repudiation of the regime that had taken the place of Marcos'. Some cause-oriented groups of the middle forces, calling themselves orphans of EDSA, held a separate commemoration filled with discontent and protest.

Dreams turned into nightmare

Indeed, the "new beginning" that everyone hoped would come with the new government after EDSA has vanished in the air. What the people see are more of the same things that happened under the dictatorship, and even some that are worse than before.

Instead of democracy for the people -- we see the same old ruling elite occupying the halls of power only with a different ruling faction in command; Marcos politicians and technocrats rehabilitated into office and known liberals sympathetic to the people's cause thrown out one after another; the people again left out in the streets, facing the barricades that separate them from Malacanang.

Instead of democratic pluralism -- we see the sabotage of peace talks with the National Democratic Front and the declaration of "total war" against the revolutionary forces and people; the use of outright violence and deceit to edge the legal leftwing party out of parliament and even out of the legal arena of struggle.

Instead of commitment to human rights -- we see violations of human rights rivalling in number and intensity those during the last three years of fascist rule; continuing concessions to the fascist AFP's constant demands to curtail civil liberties; the rapid shrinking of the "democratic space" until it has become nothing more than what the people themselves assert.

Instead of progress and prosperity -- we see the deepening poverty of the masses of the people as the Aquino government persists in implementing the Marcosian program of export-led growth fueled by foreign debt.

Instead of clean and transparent government -- we see the emergence of new oligarchs led by the Aquino-Cojuangco-Sumulong clans in a new wave of massive graft and corruption.

Instead of a nation united and reborn -- we see the national minorities deceived by endless peace talks and fake autonomy laws; increasing lawlessness; the further growth of military-bureaucrat-criminal syndicates; eruptions of violence among warring

reactionary political factions; splits within the military.

Instead of resurgent national dignity and pride--we see a more mendicant attitude towards the US and its allies; greater dependence on foreign loans; mounting external debt; stronger imperialist stranglehold on the Philippine economy.

A temporary parting of ways

Not that there is nothing to celebrate, as what the ultra-rightists led by Enrile and Laurel prate about. For EDSA was truly a great victory of the people's antifascist struggles, a collective assertion of their yearnings for democracy and a better life.

But historically, EDSA had its inherent limitations. The leadership of the uprising was seized by pro-US, anti-Marcos reactionaries and rightwing militarists. US imperialism intervened to insure that political power would be placed securely in the hands of its puppets and not the people's.

It is the duty of the nationalist and democratic forces, of all who took part in the struggles culminating in EDSA, to go beyond its limitations by continuing the momentum of the popular movement for national and social liberation. For history has already shown that the democratic aspirations of EDSA cannot be realized without the victory of the entire people's national democratic revolution.

Unfortunately, the growing unity of the popular forces, forged in the thick of life-and-death struggles against the US-Marcos dictatorship, was broken up because of the illusions of democracy fed by the reactionary EDSA leadership. And the effort towards unity was impaired when soon after taking power, the pro-US reactionaries whipped up an anti-communist hysteria that sought to equate support for democratic reforms with virulent anticommunism.

Not only serious disagreements but recriminations and faultfinding found their way into the ranks of the nationalist and democratic forces. What could have been a broad popular front to advance the struggle for fundamental changes in Philippine society was greatly weakened.

The proletarian party has criticized itself for having failed to lead the popular forces at the climactic point in the antidictatorship struggle. As a result, the masses had not been able to assert their will in an organized way, independent of the reactionary leadership at EDSA. In criticizing itself, the Party showed that self-critical attitude that distinguishes all true revolutionaries and enables them to turn defeats into lessons.

There are some, however, who have carried to excess their criticism of the Party for this particular failure and used it to downplay or even negate the crucial and outstanding role of the proletarian party and the revolutionary forces it leads in the long years of the antifascist struggle.

There are a few who even try to distort and demean the consistent efforts of the Party to pursue what is clearly the necessary task after EDSA -- to pursue the fight for the anti-imperialist and democratic cause of the Filipino people until victory.

Beyond EDSA towards greater unity

The task of strengthening and intensifying the struggle for national freedom and democracy is the responsibility of all nationalist and democratic forces, of every patriot. The Communist Party of the Philippines will continue to play its role and do its share in this noble task of national and social liberation.

The Party appreciates everything that the other progressive forces do in promoting the people's cause for national independence and democracy. But it hopes that they will completely see through Aquino's centrist pretensions and repudiate the reformist illusions that she peddles. And that they will reach out to the broad masses who continue to fight for fundamental changes and take up the armed struggle not because they see it as a question of preference or as one of many options but as the only course of action that can overturn the centuries of oppression and deprivation by foreign and local ruling classes.

The Party enjoins them to go beyond EDSA and seek in the unity of all popular forces the salvation of our country and people.

A good starting point is for all to work together on specific issues like the US military bases, foreign debt, human rights, deepening poverty and land reform.

It is also high time that we resumed the dialogue process that has served the patriotic struggle so well in the past. Let us sum up the lessons and insights drawn from many years of advancing the nationalist and democratic struggles and through this, strive to form a common agenda and course of action. The Party is willing to learn from its brothers in struggle, just as it is willing to share its valuable experiences.

Discussions and assessments of what stand to adopt and action to take must be guided by what is best for the Filipino people and conducted in a democratic and objective manner. Differences in ideology must not hinder unity on the basis of a common political program. Within the framework of unity, initiative and independence are exercised, criticisms honestly taken up to enhance unity, and decisions arrived at by consensus.

The Party believes that nothing can stand in the way of our achieving a greater unity, so long as everyone puts the interests of the Filipino people above everything else.

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NPA-CENTRAL LUZON FIGHTERS DEAL BIGGER BLOWS ON ENEMY

As the national democratic revolution enters its 21st year, the pace of NPA military operations is stepping up in Central Luzon, the cradle of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army.

Based on initial reports of *Ang Bayan* correspondents in the region, the NPA launched 12 tactical offensives from the last week of December 1988 to February 1989. These operations added 26 high-caliber rifles, thousands of ammunition and a number of communications equipment to the NPA arsenal. They also resulted in 28 enemy soldiers killed and 19 others wounded.

The opening salvo broke out in Nueva Ecija last December 29. According to the regional mass paper, *Himagsik*, soldiers of the 56th Infantry Battalion (IB) of the Philippine Army were on board a military jeep on the way to their detachment located in a PLDT relay station. Upon reaching barrio Labi, Bongabon in Nueva Ecija, the enemy soldiers were ambushed by two combined units of the NPA.

The firefight lasted about 20 minutes before the enemy was finally subdued. The NPA guerrillas confiscated seven M16 armalite rifles, three M203 rifles with grenade launchers, four rifle grenades, thousands of ammunition and a radio transceiver. Six enemy soldiers were slain; six others who were wounded surrendered. On the side of the NPA, one Red fighter died when he was treacherously shot by an enemy soldier who pretended to surrender.

The offensive in Nueva Ecija was followed by small but widespread partisan operations, arms-snatching and harassment operations in various parts of the region.

In the province of Pampanga, the New People's Army conducted three ambushes in the towns of Arayat and Floridablanca, and on the borders of Mexico and San Fernando in order to harass enemy troops. These military operations resulted in the death of two PC soldiers and seven CAFGU members. The NPA also confiscated two M16 rifles.

In Bataan, forces of the people's militia attacked and killed two soldiers of the 68th IB, Philippine Army in barrio Townsite, Limay last January 6. They also managed to confiscate the soldiers' M16 rifles.

Meanwhile, in the province of Pangasinan, NPA guerrillas ambushed soldiers of the Philippine Constabulary during the second week of January. Two constables were killed and seven others wounded. Earlier, the guerrillas confiscated two M16 rifles and one Uzi machine pistol from security guards of a fishpond in the town of Sual.

In the thick of these tactical battles, last February 6, NPA fighters again surprised a company of soldiers belonging to the 56th IB in barrio Ditumabo, San Luis,

Aurora. The soldiers were riding in a convoy of three trucks, three jeeps and a car on their way to Fort Magsaysay, Laur, Nueva Ecija after conducting a week-long military operation in Aurora. Upon reaching sitio Diabuyo, they were waylaid by the Red fighters.

According to the NPA-Aurora report, five soldiers died on the spot. The NPA guerrillas successfully conducted a cleaning operation even while the five-minute firefight was in progress, confiscating four M16s, one M14, a typewriter and highly classified documents belonging to the 56th IB.

All these offensives were launched in Central Luzon in the face of an ongoing terror campaign of the US-Aquino regime in the region.

The regime's counterinsurgency campaign intensified beginning 1988 to crush the revolutionary movement in the region. Characterized by extreme brutality, the campaign includes the bombing and burning of communities suspected to be guerrilla bases, forced evacuation of residents as well as assassinations of legal mass leaders suspected of being pro-communists.

Comprising the enemy's killing machine are 10 regular battalions of the AFP (up from five battalions), aside from five PC companies, death squads and newly created CAFGU paramilitary units already stationed in the region.

A glaring example of this counterinsurgency thrust is the case of Bataan, the most heavily militarized area in Central Luzon. While Bataan is the smallest province in the region, operating here are the 68th and 70th IB of the Philippine Army, one Scout Ranger company and four PC companies -- almost one-third of all the regular AFP troops assigned to Central Luzon.

Recently, Brig. Gen. Bayani Fabric, commander of the Norther Luzon Command which has jurisdiction over AFP units in Northern and Central Luzon, openly boasted that the NPA in Bataan will be crushed within the next six months.

But there is no doubt that the general will have to eat his words. Today, the political and military struggles of the people of Bataan and in the whole of Central Luzon continue without let-up. Agrarian struggles are reaping successes for the peasants. The people warmly support various protest actions against the US military bases. Even the burials of revolutionary fighters who died in battle have become occasions for the people to hold militant protest actions.

The string of NPA military offensives these past few months has been a painful slap on the face of the arrogant AFP, not to mention a big blow to their armed capability and manpower.

The revolutionary movement in Central Luzon has come a long way and it just cannot be destroyed easily. As Comrade Gener, a member of the Executive Committee of the Regional Party Committee in Central Luzon, stated in an interview in *Himagsik*, the central issue today in the field of armed struggle in the region is how to raise the level of war. As proven by the escalating NPA operations, the guerrillas and the revolutionary movement in Central Luzon are well on their way towards fulfilling this task.

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MINDORO: BLAZING THE WAY FOR A NEW GUERRILLA FRONT

The island of Mindoro today is no longer known only for the Mangyans, the tamaraw or Puerto Galera. It is also making news in the dailies and on radio because of the victories there of the New People's Army.

Guerrilla forces in Mindoro immediately greeted the new year with a hail of attacks against the AFP. On January 5, an NPA squad ambushed a joint PC-CAFGU patrol in barrio Pitogo, Rizal, Mindoro Occidental. They killed four soldiers and seized four M14 rifles. The NPA withdrew without any casualties.

On January 29, an oversized guerrilla platoon sprung an ambush in barrio San

Rafael, Roxas, Mindoro Oriental, which is barely three kilometers away from the town center. With the use of a land mine, they blasted a truck loaded with troops and then raked it with gunfire. Nine PC soldiers were killed, five were wounded including a PC lieutenant, and one was captured. Confiscated from them were 13 firearms, including eight M16 armalite rifles, four M14 rifles, an M203 rifle with a grenade launcher and several rounds of ammunition. Again, there were no casualties on the NPA side.

The Southern Luzon Command (SOLCOM) could not trumpet that the two operations were only isolated incidents. From October 1987 to March 1988, the NPA has launched seven tactical offensives, netting 70 high-powered arms, with 20 enemy soldiers killed and 14 more wounded. Most outstanding of these were the raids at the municipal halls of Roxas in Mindoro Oriental, and of Calintaan and Abra de Ilog in Mindoro Occidental.

The operation at Abra de Ilog on March 7, 1988 was a combined raid and ambush. Guerrilla forces posing as government troops entered the police head-quarters without firing a shot. They arrested the police chief and with his help, arrested and disarmed other policemen outside the town hall. The Red fighters occupied the poblacion for three hours and held a mass meeting before withdrawing.

Upon withdrawal, the guerrilla unit took ambush positions on the road towards Mamburao, capital of Misamis Occidental. They assaulted a truck carrying PC soldiers and policemen. As the firefight raged, the police shouted, "Comrades, we're the policemen you disarmed at Abra de Ilog!" Seized in the operation were 32 firearms, including 22 M16 armalite rifles, two M14 rifles and one M60 machine gun.

A new front for guerrilla war

The capability of the NPA to mount tactical offensives in large parts of Mindoro signals the emergence of a new front for struggle in Southern Luzon. A study of the Mindoro map will show that the recent NPA military operations cover the northern tip (Abra de Ilog), central west (Rizal and Calintaan) and southern end (Roxas).

As a result of these tactical offensives, the firepower and combat skills of guerrilla units have vastly improved. In addition to several M16 and M14 rifles, the arsenal of the people's army now also counts some grenade launchers, M60 and 30-cal. machine guns.

Moreover, the SOLCOM now has to contend not only with the increased combat strength of the NPA in Mindoro. Many know that such combat strength also denotes a large mass base. Indeed, before launching sustained NPA tactical offensives, the Party first ensures the sufficient breadth and depth of guerrilla bases and zones.

It was in 1981 when the Party started building the present guerrilla front in Mindoro. But even prior to this, it made two attempts to establish guerrilla zones in the island. The attempts, however, were not successful.

The first attempt was in 1972 after the declaration of martial law. Some progressive members of the Khi Rho, led by martyred comrade Dante Andal, organized peasants in the mountainous part of Pinamalayan, Mindoro Oriental. They were able to form a small armed propaganda unit. But because of inadequate experience in military work, they were soon discovered and crushed by the enemy before the end of 1972.

The second was in 1977. Some cadres and Red fighters from Southern Tagalog, led by martyred comrade Rey "Gildo" Robles, started to organize in Pinamalayan at the onset of the year. By September 1977, they were able to build an armed propaganda unit and some cadre teams. But with the death and loss of key cadres, the Party was again forced to temporarily retreat in October of the same year.

The Party returned to the southern part of Mindoro Oriental in 1981 and went on with its work. That year, the towns of Rizal and Sta. Cruz in the central part of Mindoro Occidental were opened with the development of the legal peasant movement. However, from 1981 to 1983, cadres and guerrillas had to run a gauntlet of severe difficulties. Because of early enemy attacks on the yet small guerrilla zone, the first armed propaganda unit and cadre teams suffered losses in personnel and were driven to the far south. From the last half of 1982 to the entire year of 1983, NPA units in Mindoro lost contact with the regional center of Southern Luzon.

Yet in the face of these adversities, cadres and Red fighters persevered in the struggle. With the people's support, the Party and NPA persisted and gradually gained strength until they reached the present level of struggle.

In mid-1988, the Party organization in Mindoro held its first conference ever.

Here, the delegates summed up the six-year experience of implementing the Party's revolutionary tasks in the island, assessed the present condition of their work and formulated a program of action. The conference also elected the members of the island Party committee. The delegates were one in declaring the conference a big success.

"Mina de Oro"

Measuring 9,735 square kilometers, Mindoro is the seventh largest island of the Philippines. It is largely mountainous with quite extensive forests and has numerous big rivers. During the rainy season, the provincial roads of Mindoro Occidental become impassable as many rivers have no bridges.

The island has a total population of 813,391. Two-thirds reside in the 15 towns of Mindoro Oriental; the rest live in the 12 towns of Mindoro Occidental. There are also 204,000 Mangyans (one-fourth of the entire population) who dwell in the mountainous areas straddling the two provinces. Many migrants in the island hail from Batangas, Marinduque and the Visayas.

Mindoro was formerly called "Mait" from the Spanish phrase "*mina de oro*" or gold mine. Indeed, the island boasts of a bounty of natural resources. The plains in the eastern central part of Mindoro Oriental (from Calapan to Victoria) have a big surplus production of rice. Both provinces also have a big production of cattle, fish (from the ocean and fish ponds) and copra. Lumber and mining are also important industries.

If Mindoro were a separate country, it could be a big exporter of agricultural products. But this does not mean that its common people endure no hardships.

The island has a serious land problem. First of all, the native Mangyans of the island were driven to the mountains by waves of settlers coming from land-scarce provinces.

At present, many of the Mangyans live in "reservation areas" just like the Indians of North America. Even then, these "reservation areas" are being penetrated by mining companies. In 1985, at least 20,000 Mangyans held a long march in Mindoro Oriental to protest the intrusion of mining companies into Mangyan lands.

Secondly, the poor settlers are oftentimes victims of landgrabbing because of the connivance of big ranchers, big landlords and government bureaucrats. This reached serious proportions during the martial law period with the "corporate farming" program. In the plains, peasants and farm workers are victimized by an onerous tenancy system and very low wages.

To protest their miserable condition, the peasants of Mindoro have boldly occupied landlord lands. They have acquired rich experiences in this, the most recent in 1986 when they occupied some corporate farms owned by Marcos cronies, like Aqua Phil. in Mindoro Occidental.

Aside from the land problem, the common people of Mindoro also suffer from the lack of light manufacturing industries. Some of the bigger towns of the island are merely collection centers for farm produce and distribution points of products from Manila. It is notable that there is not one city in the whole island. An ordinary town is merely like a big barrio of the countryside -- the only difference is that in Mindoro the former is labelled a municipality.

The rapid advance of the revolutionary armed struggle in Mindoro today can be rooted in the island's serious land problem and backward economy.

Strategic importance of Mindoro

Aside from its rich resources, Mindoro is also important to the ruling classes because of its strategic location. It is the major island closest to Luzon, especially to Manila. The body of water between Luzon and Mindoro is a major route for vessels plying Manila, the Visayas and Mindanao. Thus, Mindoro is crucial to the defense of Metro Manila, the national center of power.

In a meeting with officials of Mindoro Oriental in September 1988, defense secretary Fidel Ramos noted that the island of Mindoro is "strategic to the defense, security and stability of the Luzon mainland." The Japanese colonizers during the Second World War also noted the importance of Mindoro for the strategic defense of Luzon and Manila. In fact, though the war has long been over, there are still Japanese

stragglers hiding out in the island.

Hence, the emergence of a new front for guerrilla war in Mindoro carries strategic implications. First, the enemy in Southern Tagalog and in the whole of Southern Luzon will be compelled to spread out its combat forces. Already, aside from the augmented local PC forces in Mindoro, a part of the Regional Special Action Force (RSAF) of PC Recom 4 has also been deployed here.

Should the local PC forces no longer be enough, the SOLCOM will be forced to reduce its nine infantry battalions in Southern Tagalog or even in the Visayas. As of presstime, the mayor of Bongabon, Mindoro Oriental reported the arrival of a unit of the Army Scout Rangers to reinforce the PC provincial command. Along with Mindoro, the guerrilla front in the island of Masbate is also becoming a headache for the SOLCOM.

Second, should the combat forces of SOLCOM no longer suffice, the AFP will be pressed to beef up its forces in Southern Luzon. At present, two whole brigades of the 2nd Infantry Division of the army are deployed in Southern Luzon. The other brigade in Tanay, Rizal is assigned to the defense of Metro Manila.

Third, because of the proximity of Mindoro to the mainland of Luzon, NPA forces in the island can directly participate in military campaigns there.

Thus, it is correct for the Party in Southern Luzon to persist in building guerrilla zones and bases in Mindoro. This measure is in line with the Party's general strategy of spreading guerrilla war throughout the entire archipelago. Instead of concentrating our limited forces and resources in Luzon, we ensure the opening of new guerrilla fronts in other principal islands, especially in the Visayas and Mindanao.

With the sprouting of guerrilla fronts throughout the country, we compel the enemy to divide its offensive forces. We thus avoid repeating the bitter experience of the old Party and people's army which, because of their failure to expand outside Central and Southern Luzon, became an easy target for the AFP's concentrated attacks.

Mindoro has weathered the critical years of nurturing the seeds of revolutionary armed struggle. The mass base of the people's army has gained sufficient breadth and depth. Peasants who hail from Mindoro now comprise the majority of Party and NPA membership. The people's army itself has strengthened its firepower and combat capability. And most important of all, the Party now has a core of cadres with the capacity to find their own bearing and maintain initiative.

In a meeting of the Peace and Order Council of Mindoro Oriental last September, Fidel Ramos praised Governor Benjamin Espiritu as well as the local PC Command for leading the regional campaign against the NPA. In his enthusiasm, the governor predicted that by the end of 1988 the people's army would also be ended.

Year 1988 is over but the revolutionary armed struggle in Mindoro continues. The NPA's successful ambush in Roxas town at the onset of 1989 shows the enemy's boasts in that island to be nothing more than a lot of hot air.

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US-AQUINO'S ECONOMIC BULLISHNESS COVERS UP AILING ECONOMY

Bullish! That is how the government and the ruling classes rave about the Philippine economy. The Aquino regime boasts that the country will be the next economic tiger, the next economic miracle in Asia. In the words of Trade and Industry Secretary Jose Concepcion Jr., the Philippines is "graduating to the status of a newly-industrializing country."

The basis of this cockiness and optimism is the steady increase in the growth rates -- measured in terms of the Gross National Product (GNP) -- for the last three years. In its first year in power, the Aquino administration arrested the dive in GNP by registering a minute but significant 0.13 percent growth. In 1987, the growth rate climbed to 5.9 percent.

Last year, the growth rate went up to 6.7 percent. Translated into per capita GNP (GNP for every Filipino), the growth figure was equivalent to P1,722.00, a rise of P70

from the 1987 level. Personal consumption, government expenditure and investments -- the basic elements that make up the GNP -- all registered an increase.

The GNP line

It is easy to say that GNP by itself does not fully reflect the real state of the Philippine economy. After all, GNP does not address the fundamental problems like economic sovereignty, equitable distribution of wealth and national industrialization. One can also argue that GNP growth has not benefited the Filipino masses.

But since the regime uses GNP growth as its main prop to show off its economic achievements, one must first face this argument squarely. One must confront the enemy on his own turf, so to speak, and strip the layers of sophistry that conceal the basic weaknesses of this much-ballyhooed growth.

The first thing to ask is: why blow the trumpet when the government's own "economic recovery" program is far from complete? The regime knows too well that, based on the study of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), the economy must sustain a yearly growth of 6.5 percent *till 1991 in order to regain the 1981 level of per capita GNP*. This is to say that despite the "positive" growth rates, the Philippines is approaching the 1990s a decade behind.

In this sense, the government's self-congratulation for a fine economic performance is plain *consuelo de bobo*. The effect is comical: government praises itself for achieving a level of growth that places the economy where it was -- ten years ago.

Furthermore, the historical twist that the Aquino regime came after the crisis-ridden Marcos dictatorship gave the economy some breathing space. The twilight years of the Marcos dictatorship, notably, were characterized by the great devastation of the economy; an economy which went through its worst crisis ever. In short, there was no other direction but for the post-Marcos economy to inch up during the early stage.

But the government will find it extremely difficult to post an average 6.5 percent growth for the next few years. With the stiff and heavy conditionalities in the recently signed letter of intent to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), NEDA Secretary Solita Monsod herself expressed skepticism that the growth targets could be achieved.

For one thing, the IMF has imposed an economic austerity plan that the subservient Aquino regime is quite willing to follow. In exchange for fresh loans or new money, the government has to cut down its spending to comply with the IMF condition. Monsod, an articulate advocate of unbridled "free enterprise" at that, has raised the alarm that the IMF's austerity measures will result in the lowering of the country's growth target.

Austerity or a cutback in government expenditure does not simply mean a lower economic growth rate, which makes a bourgeois economist with a bleeding heart cry. For the masses, this means further cutbacks in basic services, since the first to be sacrificed from a reduction of government expenditure is the allocation for education, health, housing, environment and other social needs.

If, on the other hand, the 6.5 percent growth target has to be gained at all costs, it will necessitate a tradeoff that will further strangle the nation's sovereignty and debilitate the people's well-being.

A massive infusion of foreign funds -- which Monsod sees as absolutely necessary to ensure that growth -- could only mean a host of concessions, political as well as economic, to the governments and investors that are willing to pour in such funds. And, of course, this also leads to a mounting debt burden continually passed on to the backs of the Filipino masses.

Debilitating debt

This brings the discussion to another point that severely undermines the government's own "fighting target." This factor is the economic hemorrhage arising from the continuous outflow of financial resources to repay Philippine foreign debt. From 1987 to 1992, according to NEDA's debt flow projections, the Philippines has to cope with a net loan outflow of \$14.3 billion. (To compute: interest and capital repayments of \$19.6 billion minus loan inflow of \$5.3 billion.)

At present, Philippine foreign debt, according to the World Bank, is over \$30 billion. The government, however, understates this by coming out with a lower figure of

\$28 billion.

The debt is bound to get bigger since the government is set to borrow more, coupled with other factors like the revaluation of foreign currencies, especially the Japanese yen, and the rising world interest rates.

The monstrous foreign debt, together with the heavy servicing of the debt, is a big obstacle placed in the path of economic development. Debt repayment, year in and year out, eats up the largest share of the national budgetary pie.

As it is now, a huge chunk of the country's foreign exchange earnings goes to the servicing of the foreign debt. The WB calculates that a third of the country's export earnings goes to debt servicing; many other groups and economists place the figure between 40 and 50 percent. Regardless of differences in data, the conclusion remains the same. The debt service, in spite of the fact that a big part of the debt is already rescheduled, is an oppressive burden.

What does a heavy debt service burden concretely mean for the ordinary Filipinos?

Progressive and liberal economists in and out of government have time and again pointed out the opportunity costs of the high debt repayments. This means that more jobs, more food, more schools, and more hospitals could have been produced if the government were to rechannel funds for debt service to these projects.

For the millions of compatriots working overseas -- workers, sailors, entertainers and helpers -- this means that much of their hard-earned foreign exchange earnings goes to paying loans.

Yet, despite occasional outbursts against the "noble houses of finance" that have been making such ignoble demands on the Filipino people, Mrs. Aquino remains compliant to the wishes of the imperialist banks. She has pledged to honor all debts, even those in which anomalous deals were involved, and to faithfully comply with the terms. That is why she has not even seen fit to revoke Marcos' decree on automatic debt appropriations in the national budget.

Superficial growth

The Aquino government defends its debt policy by invoking the need to stabilize the economy and spur growth.

Which brings us to another point. The way the regime wants economic growth to be done is largely dependent on external, superficial factors.

First and foremost, this "growth" is propelled by external borrowings and foreign investments. The government is scrounging for foreign financing to the tune of \$15 billion. In other words, Aquino's growth strategy is at the mercy of rapacious, profit-hungry foreign bankers and capitalists.

Needless to say, growth dependent on foreign loans makes the country's outstanding debt swell. Our people sink deeper into the debt quagmire.

For the Philippines to avail itself of more loans, it has to first negotiate with the IMF, the police chief of the imperialist financial system. Being the chief of police, the IMF gives the go-signal for the release of new funds. In exchange for the new loans, the government allows the IMF to impose a new set of harsh conditions.

Suffice it to say that IMF impositions like peso devaluation, import liberalization, reduced government spending on basic services, higher taxes, higher power rates and freeze in real wages are now being resisted by an increasing number of Filipinos.

With regard to foreign investment, its harmful effects are well documented: the repatriation of capital, the remittance of superprofits, the transfer pricing, the lack of technology transfer, the heavy financing from local sources, the subordination of the Philippine economy to foreign needs.

But even without the drawbacks cited above, a cursory examination of the foreign investments at this time would show that they are of low quality.

These investments, mainly Taiwanese, are concentrated in businesses of the get-rich-quick variety. The investors are those who would immediately pull out the capital once business slackens. In other words, these are not the hard and sound

investments, those long-term investments which harness the nation's productive forces and enhance industrialization.

Hence, we see a lot of investments devoted to real estate speculation or to the building of hotels, condominiums and shopping malls. But rarely can we find investments to finance the establishment of new factories engaged, for example, in heavy manufacturing. Although investments in industry have risen, these are mainly found in the rehabilitation of old light-manufacturing plants which shut down or scaled down production during the 1983-85 depression.

Unproductive pump-priming

Another significant portion of the GNP expansion is the contribution of public sector investment. This particularly refers to the government's massive pump-priming projects, similar to the Marcos' so-called "counter-cyclical budget policy" of heavy spending to counteract extreme fluctuations in the business cycle.

But the pump-priming activities, then and now, are one-shot deals. Likewise, many of these projects that are irrelevant to the people's needs aggravate the problem of the government's yearly budget deficit. Unproductive pump-priming, in short, partially explains why the government has a yearly deficit and correspondingly, why it gets deeper in debt.

Worse, pump-priming bespeaks of the regime's political pragmatism and opportunism. It is being shrewdly used as a political weapon to appease the many who are unemployed, consolidate the political base of the Aquino faction and reinforce the deception about Aquino's populism.

Government, too, takes pride in the increase in exports. What is glossed over, however, is that in a backward, nonindustrialized economy, imports invariably outstrip exports. The government's adherence to the IMF formula of further import liberalization worsens the situation.

The estimate is that the balance-of-trade gap for 1989 will widen from \$1.06 billion last year to \$1.53 billion. Although the country had a balance of payments surplus last year, this was because maturing debts were rescheduled. Without rescheduling, the country's balance of payments would have likewise been in the red.

Further, the country's gross international reserves (GIR) dwindled from \$2.06 billion at end-December 1988 to \$1.95 billion in January 1989. This amount is equivalent to approximately two months' value of imports of goods and services, below the GIR international standard of three months' worth of imports. The level of GIR, incidentally, measures the country's capacity to finance imports and service the foreign debt.

The optimism in rising exports is also questionable. This cannot be even relied upon in the medium term.

To elaborate, let us look into the situation of the country's traditional export commodities (i.e., sugar, coconut and mining products). Fortunately for the Aquino regime, the prices of traditional export crops increased last year. But precisely, the pricing of these exports is volatile and fluctuating. The soar in prices can be immediately followed by a nosedive. The experience of the sugar industry serves as a painful lesson which the government has apparently forgotten.

The pricing, in fact, is beyond the control of the exporting country. On the whole, prices of our traditional export commodities are fixed by the importers, thus making the Philippines a price taker. This is one main danger of depending on export-oriented growth; factors hinge on the vicissitudes of an imperialist-manipulated market.

At this time, too, rising protectionism in the developed countries has become an obstruction to Philippine exports. Top Philippine exports, notably textiles, garments, coconut oil and electronic components, are the targets of these trade barriers.

To compound the problem, the signs of international recession are appearing: the hike in international oil prices, the hike in interest rates and the intensifying competition among capitalist economies. All these will constrict the world market, thereby making it doubly difficult to sell Philippine exports.

For whom?

To sum up, the economic growth being bruted about by the Aquino government is merely an illusion. Hiding behind the mask of growth rates is an economy that is moribund and in unabated crisis.

But even if the Aquino government manages to achieve the growth targets it is aiming for, the more important question is: economic growth for whom?

For it does not follow that an increase in per capita GNP results in an increase in real wages, a genuine upliftment of the people's livelihood, or their deliverance from exploitation.

To substantiate, we just have to look back at the early years of the Marcos dictatorship. In the seventies, the economy managed to register "spectacular" growth rates. In several years, economic growth rates exceeded 6.5 percent. Yet, it was also during these years that more and more Filipinos began to fall below the poverty threshold.

For instance, growth rate in 1973 was a high 9.3 percent. Still, the year marked the beginning of the unswerving decline of real wages. In 1976, the growth rate was 7.2 percent. But this was also the time when the crisis in the sugar industry exploded, bringing havoc to the lives of millions of sugarworkers.

Under the Aquino regime, the same pattern is operating. Consider the following data:

Wages cannot keep up with the rise in prices. In 1987, the purchasing power of the peso was 27.12, using 1978 as the base year. The following year, it slipped to 24.94 centavos. Inflation, although maintaining a single-digit level, jumped from 3.77 percent in 1987 to 8.76 percent in 1988.

The National Wages Council pegged the daily cost of living at P142 for a family of six (January 1988). The University of the Philippines School of Labor and Industrial Relations has computed a higher figure: for a family of four in Metro Manila, P185.33 a day. Safe to say, the combined income, based on the minimum wage, of two working people in a family is not enough to cover the minimum daily cost of living.

Unemployment, together with underemployment, continues to rise, making it one of the biggest labor problems. The national unemployment rate was 13.4 percent in the second half of last year compared to the 9.1 percent in January 1988. In Metro Manila, the unemployment rate went as high as 21.6 percent.

Further, the incidence of poverty has gone up. The September 1988 survey of the Social Weather Stations indicated a rising trend in the poverty rate. In October 1987, 51 percent of the Filipino families were below the poverty line. This went up to 60 percent in February 1988 and to 66 percent seven months after. These figures may even be understated.

It is not surprising then that a similar survey of the Social Weather Stations would reveal that the respondents from the lower classes think they have become poorer in spite of the country's "growth."

As the data presented by the bourgeoisie itself show, the Filipino masses are not the beneficiaries of the GNP growth. Clearly, it is growth for the foreign investors, creditors and traders and their local counterparts. It is growth for imperialism and the reactionary classes.

Growth in terms of GNP must be accompanied by a radical redistribution of wealth and income. Otherwise, from the people's standpoint, all the hullabaloo about growth is just a vain uproar of the ruling classes.

Such a radical redistribution, however, cannot come about without drastically changing class -- and power -- relations in Philippine society.

And this, in the final analysis, is the reason why the Aquino regime cannot be relied upon to achieve the kind of economic growth that will truly benefit the masses of the people. For it is a government for and of the imperialists, compradors and landlords. Only a people's democratic government can foster real economic growth, one that will bring about real equity, progress and prosperity.

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SPECTER OF MARCOS RETURN HAUNTS CORAZON AQUINO

Like a bad dream that recurs every night, the specter of Ferdinand Marcos' return to the Philippines has haunted the political landscape of Corazon C. Aquino for the past three years that she has occupied his place in Malacanang Palace.

For the past month, this nightmare has been recurring with particular intensity. Since December of last year, the former dictator, struck by repeated illnesses, has been in and out of a Honolulu hospital; more than at any time, the possibility of his death hovers near. In a move dripping with melodrama, his wife Imelda and son Bongbong have each written a letter to Aquino, asking that the dying man be allowed to come home for his "final rest."

Nothing, however, has shaken Aquino's conviction that dead or alive, Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines would pose a grave threat to the "preservation of the economic and political gains of the past two years." Once more citing "considerations of the highest national good," she recently reaffirmed the ban on Marcos' return -- a decision immediately approved by a chorus of Congressional and local leaders, Cardinal Sin and other members of the Catholic hierarchy, and media sympathizers.

Her argument has been strengthened by the filing of racketeering charges against Marcos and his wife before a US district court. This case would have to be resolved first, she said, before Marcos can be allowed to return home.

Justice -- people's concern, not Aquino's

What seems to have been forgotten in all this concern for Marcos' human rights, Aquino's right to preserve her rule and the US government's right to pursue the case against Marcos is the paramount right of the Filipino people to bring to justice the former dictator who had caused them so much suffering, misery and hardship for 20 years.

The former tyrant and the rest of his clique still have to answer for the trampling of the human and democratic rights of the Filipino people during the two decades of his reign; for the lives of thousands of Filipinos that were wasted and lost -- in the battlefields, streets and prison camps; for the immense wealth and resources of the land that Marcos gang plundered or mortgaged to foreign banks.

But this settling of accounts with Marcos is what the US government and the Aquino regime have prevented the people from doing since the overthrow of the dictator three years ago.

As the people were about to clinch their victory in bringing down the Marcos dictatorship, the US government intervened, spiriting out Marcos and his retinue before the people's wrath could reach them.

The Aquino regime, instead of bringing back the former dictator to answer for the crimes he had committed against the Filipino people, has been letting Marcos escape from the people's justice. It has delayed the filing of criminal charges against him, although lawyers of the Presidential Commission on Good Government themselves admit that they have collected enough evidence to convict Marcos. It has relinquished to the US government whatever legal authority it has left over Marcos by allowing him to be brought before a US court.

Knowing that Aquino's inordinate fear of Marcos' return makes her extremely vulnerable to US pressures, the US has cooperated in keeping the former dictator on indefinite exile in Honolulu. The Marcos card is useful to the US in whipping the Aquino government into line, especially on such matters as the US bases, foreign debt payments and the counterinsurgency campaign.

All these underscore the fact that the issue between Ferdinand Marcos and Corazon Aquino is not one of justice. The proposal by Aquino's brother, Peping Cojuangco, on the conditions for allowing Marcos' return, reveals the real issue behind all the rhetoric on the "highest national good."

According to Cojuangco, if only Marcos would "recognize the legitimacy of the Aquino government," subordinate himself to it, and pay a big enough price to prove his submission (at least \$5 billion of the Marcos loot is the current going price) -- then a reconciliation with him would not be difficult.

The issue between Marcos and Aquino is clearly one of power -- Marcos must agree to become part of the ruling class consensus that recognizes the Aquino faction as the dominant one in the reactionary state and to play by the rules that the latter has set for political power-sharing. But so long as Marcos is a rival for the same ruling class consensus, Aquino cannot allow him back into the country.

Basis of Aquino's fears

The basis of Aquino's vulnerability to the Marcos threat lies in the very nature of her government. She is beholden to the same big landlord-comprador interests that Marcos was. She relies on the same oppressive structures that Marcos did. She depends on the same foreign master that he upheld -- US imperialism.

It is not surprising that the Aquino regime has come to accommodate and allow back into power even the very same people who helped prop up the Marcos dictatorship.

The very same generals and colonels whom the former dictator trained and used to repress the people are the ones now in charge of Aquino's "total war." Those responsible for the killing, torture and disappearance of thousands of Filipinos during the Marcos years still continue to kill, torture and kidnap more Filipinos, this time in the name of a ruler who promised to be the exact opposite of Marcos.

Marcos technocrats are back in positions that enable them to determine or influence government policies. Marcos' debt negotiator, Central Bank Governor Jose Fernandez, and debt manager, Cesar Virata, are playing important roles in Aquino's debt-based economic program. This program is based on the premise that foreign loans are essential to the growth of the economy -- very much like the economic philosophy that led to the ballooning of the foreign debt to \$26 billion under Marcos.

Politicians who once gathered around Marcos' Kilusang Bagong Lipunan are once more in Congress and in the local government, waving the banner of their new party -- Aquino's Laban ng Demokratikong Pilipino. Some Marcos cronies who fled abroad have quietly returned and now share ownership of their businesses with a host of Aquino relatives.

It is easy to see why the Aquino regime is so fearful of bringing Marcos to trial in a Philippine court today -- a large part of the present government would itself be indicted.

And it is easy to see why Aquino herself is so fearful of letting the former dictator back on Philippine soil. Since she has turned her back on the people's power that swept out the Marcos dictatorship and on their demand for fundamental change, she has lost the main thing that would have assured the stability of her government in the face of the Marcos threat. She can no longer call upon a united people to counteract the destabilizing and divisive forces that a comebacking Marcos might unleash.

And so the familiar scenario repeats itself over and over again -- until Marcos' death. Even then, his ghost will surely continue to bedevil the Aquino regime. Only the Filipino people can lay that ghost to rest, when their demand for justice finally takes its course.

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