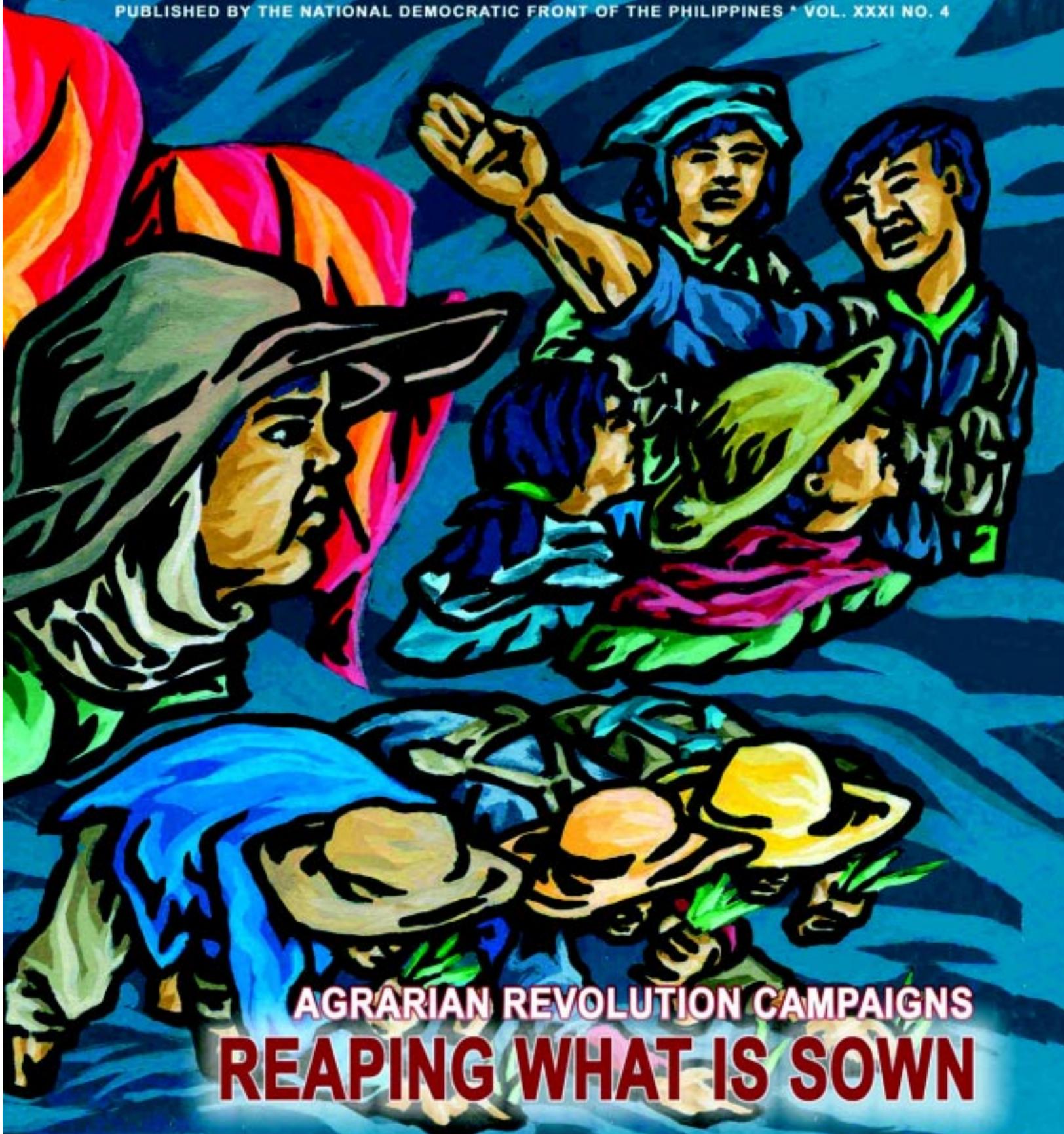


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**AGRARIAN REVOLUTION CAMPAIGNS
REAPING WHAT IS SOWN**

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IN THIS ISSUE

Cover Stories



Agrarian Revolution Campaigns: Reaping What is Sown **3**

NDFP Position on agrarian reform **6**

The Lines on Manong Goyot's Face **9**

Countercurrent

The US-Arroyo Regime: Fraud, Terrorism and Servility **11**

Mainstream

Firefight in Pura, Tarlac: Victory for the NPA,

Shameful Defeat for the AFP **14**

Philippine Human Rights Advocacy: Back on Track **16**

Three Young Communists **22**

Isnayp: Sharp Shooters **26**



The National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) is an alliance of revolutionary organizations with roots in the various sectors and regions of the Philippines.

Its goal is to build a society that enjoys national sovereignty, authentic democracy, social justice, progress and peace.

It seeks to unite with all forces willing to achieve these goals.

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AGRARIAN REVOLUTION CAMPAIGNS:

Reaping WHAT IS SOWN

Some people have this notion of revolutionary struggles as simply that of great gun battles and large mass actions. The truth is, thoroughgoing changes are wrought not by such events, but by the daily, painstaking actions of a people determined to break free from their chains.

The following are stories of agrarian revolution campaigns that have been waged in the countryside, all done without fanfare. It is actions such as these that are, slowly and surely, chipping away at the ruling elite's economic and political power, bringing the national democratic struggle closer to victory.

By Juan Victor





Rising from the hard earth

The kind of soil found in San Isidro (not its real name), a remote village in Eastern Visayas, is too hard to till, unyielding even to the farmers' steel plows, frustrating impoverished farmers who desperately need whatever sustenance land could give. For a long time, San Isidro's land laid wasting, with only *camote* (sweet potatoes) growing from its hard earth.

Soon, a unit of the New People's Army (NPA) was deployed in the area. The villagers had already heard of the *kaubans* (literal meaning: companions) from stories of people from other towns. With their desperate situation, they had in fact been looking forward to meeting the Red fighters.

The *kaubans* painstakingly explained to the masses how it was possible for them to achieve revolutionary change. San Isidro then became part of a chapter of the *Pambansang Katipunan ng Magbubukid* or PKM (National Organization of Peasants) that covered a cluster of small villages which included San Isidro. PKM is the revolutionary peasant organization allied to the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP).

The NPA and PKM sought ways to make the land productive as part of the implementation of the revolutionary agrarian reform program. They found that during the rainy season, the land became soft enough to be plowed, not with the steel plows, but by having the carabao walk several times over the field. They also implemented the traditional method of farming in the area, not dependent on imported fertilizers nor pesticides.

After the PKM chapter had developed enough strength in terms of number and ideological consolidation, it launched a series of land occupation campaigns, targeting those owned by the most despotic landlords whose economic and political power in the area had very much dwindled because of the presence of the revolutionary forces. Although spontaneous land occupations had been

reported as occurring sporadically in the area since the 1980s, the PKM unified and coordinated these efforts.

Most of the lands seized were placed under the management of a cooperative set up by the villagers. Profits were distributed according to a work-point system devised by the farmers themselves, ensuring a democratic sharing of the proceeds.

The PKM also launched campaigns to raise the price of palay, demand higher wages for plantation farm workers and stop the use by devious merchants of tampered weighing scales.

San Isidro is one of the 30 large barangays in this province covered by a series of agrarian campaigns benefiting over 1000 peasant families. To this day, the small peasant community enjoys the fruits of their struggles.



Photos on pages 1-3 were taken during a luyo-luyo (collective farming) in a guerrilla zone in Bicol. They show revolutionary farmers preparing the land for planting. Colored versions of the photos are posted in www.philippinerevolution.org.

Reasons to smile

For quite some time, Party leaders in a Central Luzon village were stumped over how to overcome what they described as “*baradong pagsusulong ng rebolusyonaryong gawain*” (stunted advance of revolutionary work). Despite being a consolidated Red area, the masses have become half-hearted in responding to calls for meetings and mobilizations, recruitment to the NPA was slow and the mass organizations dormant. It came to a point that they blamed themselves as “*walang bisa*” (ineffectual).

To address the problem they first conducted an exhaustive social investigation of the area, leading to the recognition of weaknesses, such as economism and legalism promoted by the former revolutionary leaders who later turned to factionalism when confronted with their errors. Very importantly, they identified the urgent issues that the village faced. They realized that the earlier “observation” put forward by former comrades that the masses were affected by the arrival of several companies of Scout Rangers in a nearby military camp, “*umaayaw kundi man umiiwas sa mga kasama* (refusing if not avoiding comrades),” was actually a subjective and false assumption.

Accordingly, a campaign to address the most urgent land issue was launched, with the call, “Stop landgrabbing!” Underground mass organizations in the seven barrios covered by the campaign eagerly participated, from the PKM to Makibaka and Kabataang Makabayan, the revolutionary women and youth organizations, respectively.

They targeted four, big, despotic landlords: Landlord A who operates a mango plantation and was unabashed in driving peasants away; Landlord B who owns a 130-hectare cow ranch; Landlord C whose land he grabbed from hapless peasants and now being developed into a resort and golf course; and Landlord D who has been evicting peasant families from their homes, citing alleged court victories.

As opening salvo, almost 200 PKM members divided into three groups conducted a coordinated sabotage operation, each group backed up by three NPA squads. Almost half of them armed with *paltik* (home-made shotguns), .38 cal. revolvers, bolos

and scythes, the angry masses stormed into Landlord A’s plantation, knocked down the fences as well as several hundred mango trees. Another group confiscated and slaughtered several heads of cows in the target ranch, another put up a streamer signed by the PKM warning the third landlord not to use his private army against the masses. The NPAs helped by disarming the guards. After a week, it meted the death penalty on Landlord C inside his compound which lies right beside the military camp. This particular landlord owed several blood debts, having ordered the murder of several farmers.

The peasants were invigorated and, soon, planned more activities. Later, 700 of them held a rally in the town center, in front of the houses of the big landlords, shouting revolutionary slogans in the middle of the plaza, a stone’s throw away from the municipal hall.

As a result of these actions, the PKM, CPP and NPA were deluged with requests from the masses, asking for help in their various land problems. More agrarian campaigns thus followed, simultaneously conducted in different clusters of barrios, eventually spreading to the entire guerrilla front. Among the victorious campaigns was the reduction of interest rates of 15-30% to 8-10% which eventually became the standard in the area.

Meanwhile, Ka Ruben, one of the peasant leaders, said, “*Ang dating pagkatakot sa laksa-laksang Scout Rangers... ay napangibabawan dahil napatunayan ng masa na ang kanilang nagkakaisang lakas at kapangyarihan ay di-matatapatan ng laki at lakas-sandata ng kaaway*” (The “fear” of the large number of Scout Rangers was overcome because the masses proved that their unified strength and power can outweigh the enemy’s strength in number and arms). In fact, the masses right in the barrio where the scout rangers’ camp is located have been active participants in agrarian revolution.



The following is an excerpt from the NDFP's 12-Point Program . The Program serves as guide and rallying point for the revolutionary movement in its fight for an

independent, democratic, just and progressive future. This particular provision tackles the NDFP's position on agrarian reform.

6. IMPLEMENT GENUINE AGRARIAN REFORM, PROMOTE AGRICULTURAL COOPERATION, RAISE RURAL PRODUCTION AND EMPLOYMENT THROUGH MODERNIZATION OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL INDUSTRIALIZATION AND ENSURE AGRICULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY.

The current minimum land reform program involves the reduction of land rent and abolition of usury, and the setting up of mutual aid and labor exchange systems among the peasantry. In this connection, the wages of farm workers and the prices of agricultural products at the farm gate have also been improved.

For the past 20 years, the revolutionary movement has carried out this minimum program in ever-widening areas in the countryside. Even at this stage, far-reaching economic, political and social changes are being effected, including a substantial improvement in the livelihood of the peasantry.

The growth of the revolution has also made it possible in certain areas for land to be confiscated from despotic landlords and landgrabbers and redistributed to peasants, for unjust debts to be condoned, for some peasant cooperatives to be organized, and for appropriate technologies to be introduced.

After nationwide victory of the revolution, it shall be possible to carry out the maximum land reform program, which involves the confiscation of landlord property and the equitable distribution of the land to the landless tillers at no cost to them.

Comprehensive agrarian reform shall be completed under the people's democratic republic for all arable land, aquaculture, livestock and grazing lands with due consideration to ancestral lands of the Bangsa Moro and indigenous peoples.

Beneficiaries of land reform and other owner-cultivators shall be given support services and incentives to increase production and incomes in agriculture and side occupations.

Agricultural cooperation shall be vigorously promoted and shall run ahead of mechanization. The process of cooperativization and mechanization shall be accomplished in stages and in connection with the development of industry.

Rich peasants shall be allowed to retain their land. They will, however, have to rely on their own labor power rather than on hired labor.

Landlords who do not oppose land reform and cooperate with the people's democratic government shall be given adequate means of livelihood so their families can have a decent life.

Modern plantations owned and controlled by transnationals or their business allies among the big comprador landlords shall be taken over by the state. These capital-intensive and large-scale farms shall be run by the state or cooperatives of agricultural workers.

Capitalist farm-owners who have supported the revolution shall be allowed to work with the state to raise agricultural production and modernize agriculture. However, farm workers in these enterprises shall form unions, participate in management and be assured of improved working and living conditions and a just share in the surplus generated.

Major refining, processing and marketing of agricultural

products shall be undertaken by the state enterprises and agricultural cooperatives in accordance with the type of crop, its relative importance to the national economy and the people's livelihood, other factors specific to the product, and capabilities of the sector concerned.

While local processing and marketing of a wide variety of agricultural products by individual households shall be encouraged, no enterprise shall be allowed to exploit the peasants and farm workers, engage in hoarding, or impose monopolistic prices.

Production of farm equipment and tools, seed varieties, fertilizers, pesticides, and other agricultural inputs, and consumer products suited to local conditions shall be promoted. Industry shall be required to serve the producer and consumer needs of the working people, mainly the peasant masses.

Support services such as technical assistance, irrigation and distribution of water resources, credit, marketing and storage facilities shall be provided. The state shall rely on the cooperation of the peasant organizations and cooperatives.

Livestock production, fishing and aquaculture shall be developed and their producers, especially the small ones, shall be encouraged to form cooperatives or associations and given state assistance.

The depletion, pollution and destruction of marine resources, especially by transnational firms and foreign fishing fleets shall be stopped. These resources shall be protected, rehabilitated and developed to benefit Filipino fisherfolk in particular and the people in general.

Programs to raise productivity and improve agricultural management and technology shall be instituted. These include research on and development of appropriate agricultural technologies and crop diversification.

Ecologically sound farming practices shall be promoted to ensure that agricultural production will be sustainable.

Agricultural development programs and appropriate technologies to be adopted shall give due recognition to conditions of rural women and shall enhance their capabilities in agricultural production as well as lessen the burden of household work.

Agriculture shall become the base of the economy, providing food and other necessities to the people as well as raw materials for industry.

With increased incomes from agricultural and non-agricultural activities, rural communities will provide an expanding market for goods produced by domestic industry.

The state plan for rural industrialization shall utilize the expansion of rural markets and agricultural modernization to increase manufacturing activities in the rural areas and create greater employment opportunities there.

He also noted that the farmers' revolutionary action, which was combined with selective military actions of the NPA, elevated the masses' morale leading to greater determination to fight.

Meanwhile, NPA recruitment has gone up, enabling the formation of another NPA unit.

As the masses gained confidence in fighting despotic landlords and confronting military threats, becoming even more united in waging armed revolution, the Party leaders in the area felt triumphant, seeing the positive results of their efforts. More than ever, they saw the important role the Party plays in the anti-feudal struggle.

The masses now tease them, "*Maaliwalas na ang mukha ng mga kasama kapag nagtatasa!*" (Frowns have left the comrades' faces when assessing their work.)



– gathering banana blossoms from wild banana plants. A sackful of banana blossoms or *gabi* or corn can be traded with one *salop* (roughly equivalent to two and one-fourth kilos) of rice and some coffee and sugar.

Landlords and rich peasants, however, turn their cows and carabaos loose in the area, letting them feed on the banana, *gabi* and camote plants. Even the *amukaw* (banana plants that are barely edible because of its fruits which are full of seeds) from which the villagers get banana blossoms to trade are not spared from being eaten by the animals. Many of the villagers were thus forced to clear and plant in steep mountain slopes which even carabaos could not traverse and takes several hours to reach.

Some 200 tribal families were affected by this problem. They complained to no avail to the owners and barangay officials. When the NPA came and the villagers formed a PKM chapter, one of their immediate tasks was to find a solution to the problem. They drew up a guideline regarding animal grazing that recognizes the right of anyone to raise animals but at the same time recognizes the right of farmers to grow crops and benefit from their harvest. The guideline thus prohibited animals from being set loose in farmed areas, designating specific places for animal grazing. The owners were given ample time to put up fences to keep their animals from wandering off but firmly warned that after said period, any animal found outside the grazing area would be slaughtered.

The day after the deadline for fencing expired, some 80 farmers that included men and women, together with a squad of NPA guerrillas, marched through the five sitios, carrying bolos, pots and seasonings. They seized a cow owned by a big landlord which they found trashing crops

Partners with the NPA

The southern part of Zambales used to be known as *sementeryo ng Hukbo* (NPA cemetery). It is because of a series of armed encounters in the area in the late '70s that wiped out entire NPA units and an incident wherein members of an armed propaganda unit was poisoned by the house owner that hosted them. The tragedies were results of weaknesses in social investigation, mass work and implementation of the movement's revolutionary agrarian reform program. For two decades, the NPA was a word mentioned by the old villagers only when reminiscing the past.

Soon, an NPA squad arrived, armed with lessons from the earlier organizing experience in the area. Revolutionary work in the many clusters of villages successfully took off in just a few months. Instrumental were the painstaking mass work and successful implementation of agrarian campaigns that immensely helped lighten the burden of poor peasants.

One agrarian campaign covered five upland *sitios* (part of a village). It showed how the masses benefit concretely from agrarian revolution. Majority of the villagers were Aetas whose livelihood dwindled when the lahar flowed down their land when Mt. Pinatubo erupted in 1991. They now depended on whatever proceeds they could get from the banana, corn, *camote* (sweet potato) and *gabi* (taro) that they plant, as well as on what they call "sabunganay"

and slaughtered it, dividing the meat among the villagers.

Later, the PKM chapter launched more agrarian campaigns, including the campaign for higher wages for farm workers of an NGO-run rice program (from P100 to P120 per day); prompt payment of wages for the cassava plantation workers; and the establishment of a communal farm near the lahar covered area.

And, very importantly, as described in an issue of *Himagsik*, the revolutionary paper in Central Luzon, “*Natuto na ring makipag-usap sa kanila nang pantay-mata ang ilang mayamang magsasaka at panginoong maylupa sa lugar.*” (Rich peasants and landlords learned to dialogue with the peasants as equals.)

“*Salamat sa NPA,*” villagers said, “*Itinuro nila sa amin kung paano magkaisa at ilaban ang aming karapatan.*” (We thank the NPA for having taught us how to unite and fight for our rights)

A harvest of economic and political gains

The full implementation of genuine agrarian reform is not possible without dismantling the structures of feudalism, semi-feudalism and semi-colonialism in Philippine society, and replacing them with those that promote national liberation and social emancipation.

The revolutionary agrarian reform program, an integral part of the national democratic revolution, has given the peasantry renewed hope for complete liberation from class oppression.

Its minimum program of reducing land rent and interest rates on one hand, and raising the wages and improving the working conditions of farm workers on the other, seeks to break the stranglehold of landlords and usurers over the Filipino peasant. In some cases, the revolutionary peasant movement reaches a level that

enables it to go beyond the minimum program, such as land confiscation or occupation.

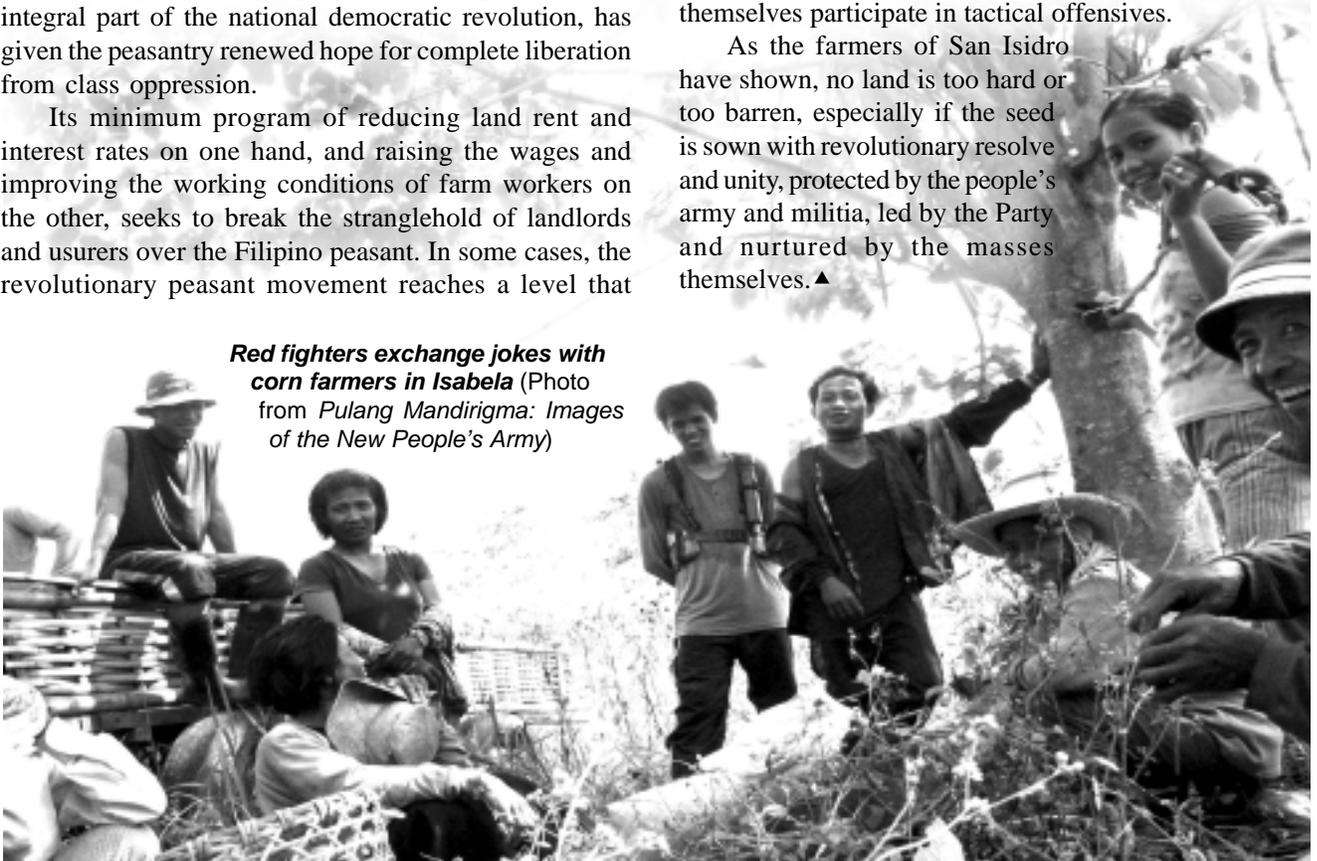
Since its implementation, peasant families in various guerrilla fronts in the country have been slowly experiencing the changes brought about by the agrarian revolution. Increased shares in the harvest, improved farm workers’ wages, reduced lending rates and better prices for commercial goods are only some of its concrete results.

Through agrarian revolution, the peasant masses reap not only economic benefits but political gains as well. They learn to face up to landlords, capitalists and government agencies and push for their demands in an organized way. In the process of waging their struggles, their level of militancy swiftly rises, their resistance intensifies. They create tighter bonds with other oppressed classes and gain support from the middle forces. In many areas, village and municipal level organs of political power are step-by-step taking shape.

As a result, favorable conditions for revolutionary advance are being laid down, from Party building to armed struggle. For one, the successful recruitment of Red fighters and Party members demonstrates the broadening and deepening mass support for armed struggle and the Party. Mass support is also evident in the way the masses provide for the daily needs of the people’s army and whenever they secure large gatherings of comrades such as trainings and meetings. In some instances, the masses themselves participate in tactical offensives.

As the farmers of San Isidro have shown, no land is too hard or too barren, especially if the seed is sown with revolutionary resolve and unity, protected by the people’s army and militia, led by the Party and nurtured by the masses themselves. ▲

Red fighters exchange jokes with corn farmers in Isabela (Photo from *Pulang Mandirigma: Images of the New People’s Army*)



The Lines on Manong Goyot's Face

A Story of a peasant community's struggle for change

By Isaiah Labrador

THOSE WHO SAW MANONG GOYOT FIVE YEARS AGO would have noticed the deep lines of anxiety and uncertainty etched on his face.

Manong Goyot's family has patiently put up with the backward farming method in their community. The only tools they have are scythes, used for cutting and reaping. It doesn't help that the land they till is located on a steep hill. Meanwhile, life is made harder for Manong Goyot's family by the high cost of goods they need to buy everyday such as soap, cooking oil, sugar, rice, salt and coffee.

But even as Manong Goyot and his wife toiled on, they thought of ways to improve their lot. Too much rain during the wet season and the hot sun of the dry season wreck havoc on their harvest. Manong Goyot wanted to get a loan to be able to hire farmhands but was apprehensive of doing so for fear of not being able to pay. At the then standard rate of 20% interest, his harvest would just be enough to pay the loan, and his family would end up with empty stomachs.

He wasn't alone in his plight. All the residents in his sitio, most of whom are settlers, face the

same dilemma. After the unabated expansion of banana plantations in the area in the '90s, Manong Goyot and other farmers like him have been forced to the outskirts of the village, at the foot of Compostela Valley's huge mountains, overlooking Agusan's flowing rivers.

Indeed, those who met Manong Goyot five years ago would remember the lines on his face. But now, his face is different – lines from

smiling and satisfaction, and not anxiety and apprehension etch his face.

Manong Goyot narrated his plight to the New People's Army (NPA) when he became a member of the peasant organizing group in his community in 1998. With NPA guidance, Manong Goyot and the townsfolk slowly changed their miserable situation.

For when a person enters



Manong Goyot's sitio, he will immediately see the store that stands in its center. It is a store that Manong Goyot and other members of the community proudly declare as their own.

The consumers' cooperative was built with their collective effort. Driven by hardship and encouraged by the people's army, Manong Goyot and 10 other villagers started their *komunal* (community farm), clearing a portion of land and planting four gantas of corn. After harvest, they sold the corn and earned P4,000. They put aside P3,000 to purchase goods for their store and the remaining money to purchase materials and tools to build the store. After a week's labor on the construction, they finally set up their cooperative.

Soon, the cooperative became the economic center in their sitio.

The cooperative provides two things that greatly benefit the people. One, it provides low-priced consumer goods and farming tools. Even the other store owners in the area decided to close shop and join the cooperative. The membership of the

cooperative now covers 90% of the community's population.

Two, the presence of the cooperative reduced if not completely eliminated usury which used to be prevalent in the town. The cooperative has since been providing loans for members and even non-members in the barrio. Its five-percent interest rate for members and eight-percent for non-members are a welcome reduction from the 20% interest in loans offered by usurers.

In addition, the cooperative provides a 5% patronage refund to every member for his or her purchases in a year.

Meanwhile, the cooperative also owns a one-hectare lot planted with bananas. Each member takes turns to farm the lot for a day. It has also expanded to hog raising and poultry, providing opportunities for members interested in livestock raising.

But not everything goes smoothly at all times, as when the cooperative became the target of intrigues and threats. During its first year, other storeowners sowed intrigues in the community, claiming that only the cooperative's officials would gain

from the store. Eventually, the officials and storeowners faced each other before the revolutionary government's local committee to thresh out their differences.

Another problem was threats from government soldiers who said the NPA owned the cooperative. The members confronted the soldiers, challenging them to look at the coop's records.

Manong Goyot's barrio now has four groups of *komunal*, excluding the *komunal* that started the cooperative. Even with the most basic of tools for production, the farmers' collective effort enabled them to cover many farm lots, giving the community a relatively secure source of food.

This is why Manong Goyot's face is nowadays always lined with smiles. With their cooperative, he saw how land full of wild shrubberies was converted to productive use supplying the community with food crops. And he has even more reason to smile as those from other towns request to learn from them about their cooperative, paving the way for developing closer relations between farmers of different towns.

The cooperative and *komunal* have taught the community a lesson on the value of collective and united action. It was a liberating experience for them, who were used to individually tending their farm lots. To pinpoint shortcomings and determining what areas to improve on, they conduct regular criticism and self-criticism sessions. This, Manong Goyot believes, is what has made their cooperative successful, along with the guidance of the people's army and the Party. ▲



THE US-ARROYO REGIME:

FRAUD, TERRORISM, SERVILITY

By Jacinto Maypag-asa

Joseph Ejercito Estrada and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo share the “distinction” of being confronted with protest actions even before they could be proclaimed as elected presidents.

But, at least, Estrada was at the peak of his popularity for most of his first 100 days as elected president. In Arroyo’s case, she would see her approval ratings plunge within the first two months of her fresh term.

As per the latest survey by the Social Weather Station, the results of which were released early December, there has been as yet no trend reversal for Arroyo.

The phenomenon of a newly-elected president with a sinking popularity is quite unprecedented in the Philippines.

However, in Arroyo’s case, it is not surprising at all.

Massive Fraud

Vote-buying, fraud and terrorism, more popularly referred to as guns, goons & gold, are regular fare in reactionary elections. All presidents of previous puppet regimes have won through the same dirty formula.

But so blatant were Arroyo’s methods that her victory was not believable even by reactionary system’s standards.

Even before the campaign period could begin, Arroyo had already courted controversy with her

appointment of two Commission on Elections (Comelec) commissioners with tainted records.

Virgilio Garcillano had a hand in the vote-shaving and vote-padding operations against Sen. Aquinilo Pimentel, Jr. in the 1995 senatorial election. Manuel Barcelona, on the other hand, had donated P50,000 to Arroyo’s campaign funds, and the public could not be assured that he would be non-partisan as Comelec commissioner.

Then there were reports that Arroyo had used some P15 billion in government funds to finance her electoral campaign. These reports were corroborated off the record through a number of media interviews with Arroyo



insiders after the election, revealing that government offices had experienced “massive withdrawals” weeks before the beginning of the three-month campaign period.

Lawyer Ferdinand Rafanan, former Comelec public information officer, had told reporters that Arroyo could be disqualified for using public funds for her electoral campaign – an act prohibited by law. He would suddenly find himself relieved of his post and reassigned to Mindanao.

After the votes were cast, a church-initiated and broad-based poll monitor called Patriots was able to document some 87 irregularities in the canvassing of votes. Such other irregularities were confirmed during the canvassing of presidential votes at the Senate, where bitter disputes erupted between the administration and opposition camps over the obvious alterations and discrepancies in the tallies of votes.

Patriots was likewise able to document 26 cases of electioneering, 75 cases of vote-buying, and 27 cases of ballot box-snatching or switching.

Aside from these, the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPCRV) revealed that three million voters had been disenfranchised in the 2004 election – enough to affect the outcome of the polls, considering that Arroyo claimed to have won over her closest rival, actor Fernando Poe, Jr., merely by a million votes.

Arroyo raided the government’s coffers and used the entire machinery of the state for her election campaign. But she still had to resort to massive counting and canvassing fraud to push her claim to the presidency. Her inability to win over a political neophyte whose popularity is derived from being a movie actor and whose campaign machinery was in disarray is instructive of

two things. Her track record of servility to US imperialism during the last three years has pushed the masses deeper into poverty and desperation over her rule. Second, the political crisis of the ruling system is so deep that the clique in power failed to win in a convincing manner with the machinery and resources at her disposal and even with the failure of the opposition to present a formidable challenge to her rule.

Arroyo was not able to legitimize her rule. The reactionary elections failed as a venue for reconciling contradictions among the ruling class.

Servility

Right after Arroyo’s roclamation the people saw a rise in water and power rates. Oil prices skyrocketed uncontrollably locally and internationally. Even at times when the rise in world oil prices eased

a bit, local oil companies continued to increase the prices of oil and gas.

Not even doctored government statistics was able to hide the fact that towards the end of the year, prices of utilities and basic commodities continued to increase and so did the number of unemployed and underemployed.

These are but consequences of the policies of liberalization, deregulation and privatization. These same policies were pursued by her predecessors. But Arroyo, who as a senator in 1995 had brought the Philippines under the wing of imperialist globalization by leading her colleagues in ratifying the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which paved the way for the country’s entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO), may yet earn the distinction of being the most servile puppet of US imperialism. For as the world capitalist system remains in deep crisis and voices of dissent are being raised against the economic, political, and military aggression of US imperialism, Arroyo sticks to being one of the first to defend and support imperialist policies and actions internationally. Even as other

neo-colonies are pushed to slacken or backtrack a little in its implementation of the policies of liberalization, deregulation and privatization, Arroyo intransigently pursues these very same policies, thereby sinking the country deeper into crisis.

Not surprisingly, Arroyo is being confronted by several protest actions. Even small and medium businessmen are opening up to militant organizations as the latter consistently take a position and conduct mass actions against the policies of liberalization, deregulation and privatization.

The public outrage against the Arroyo regime almost came to a head when truck driver



Angelo de la Cruz was taken hostage by Iraqi resistance fighters early July. His captors demanded that Filipino troops sent to Iraq as part of the US-led international "peacekeeping forces" be pulled out in exchange for his life.

The hostage crisis was met by broad rallies demanding the pull-out of the Filipino troops from Iraq. In the end, Arroyo was forced to give in.

The Angelo de la Cruz hostage crisis showed how badly Arroyo had fallen out of the people's good graces. She was willing to endure a temporary conflict with her masters in Washington as an "alternative" to a head-on collision with public opinion – which seemed ready to take to Edsa once again.

That Arroyo could not easily stave off people's discontent is evident in the fact that the eight tax measures she has been pushing for, as remedies to the "fiscal crisis" she admitted in August to have hit the country, has been experiencing rough sailing in Congress – due to public opposition to additional tax burdens.

Arroyo's approval rating fell further with the exposure of large-scale corruption involving Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) president and general manager Winston Garcia and former Armed Forces of the Philippines comptroller Carlos Garcia. That Winston Garcia had been practically let off the hook did not help the Arroyo government. The Garcias of Cebu has been accused of being involved in the massive fraud committed to give Arroyo the needed lead in the 2004 elections.

Terrorism

The US-Arroyo regime is increasingly employing state terrorism to stem the growing tide of people's resistance.

The "no permit, no rally" policy, which is based on Batas Pambansa 880, one of the repressive laws passed by the dictator Marcos during

Martial Law, is being strictly enforced. The violent dispersal of the July 13 rally for the release of Angelo de la Cruz was indicative of the intolerance of the regime.

But its fascist head appears more viciously in the countryside where the AFP rules, thus rendering local officials inutile. Members of legal democratic organizations are special targets of attack.

Ever since the Arroyo regime came into power, 48 members of Bayan Muna, Anakpawis, Anak ng Bayan, and the Gabriela Women's Party have been killed. Also, the AFP and PNP harassed the campaign sorties of six progressive partylist groups, to include Migrante and Suara Bangsa Moro parties, and warned their supporters against voting for them. The soldiers and police openly campaigned instead for Akbayan and four other administration backed partylist groups.

Fourteen human rights workers were killed. On November 23 of last year, 58 members of a fact-finding and medical mission were assaulted by soldiers and CAFGUs in Mindoro Occidental. Even the Marcos fascist dictatorship did not have the temerity to kill so many human rights workers and violently attack them in the course of fact finding missions.

The Hacienda Luisita massacre is a classic case of the regime's collusion with big landlords and comprador bourgeoisie. To protect the interest of the Cojuangco family against the peaceful strike of the workers and peasants in the hacienda, the Secretary of Labor issued a return to work order. It paved the way for the violent attack on the picketlines by combined forces of the AFP and PNP. According to reports from residents, two of the seven identified slain victims were wounded but still alive. The two were subsequently killed and their hands tainted with gunpowder to make it appear that the peaceful strikers were armed.

These are but some of the cases in the long list of violations by the regime of human rights and international humanitarian law. According to the human rights group Karapatan, in 2004 alone, the Arroyo regime committed 570 cases of human rights violations victimizing 9924 people, including 68 victims of enforced disappearances.

Enough of the US-Arroyo regime

The results of various surveys showing a continuous plunge in the popularity and satisfaction ratings of the US-Arroyo regime indicate the Filipino people's worsening discontentment with the current administration. And the challenge for all democratic classes and sectors is to mobilize a broad front and muster enough forces to oust Arroyo from power. The movement against Arroyo must be able to provide different venues and forms of struggle where the masses can ventilate their grievances and transform these into action.

While the legal democratic movement engages the Arroyo regime with different forms and methods of struggle in the urban areas, the armed struggle in the countryside will weaken and disperse the regime's armed forces, its main instrument for coercion and suppression.

At the same time, the revolutionary forces must be able to explain to the Filipino people that ousting the Arroyo regime will not be enough to achieve genuine freedom and democracy. Although the Arroyo regime's ouster will further weaken the reactionary state, there is still a need to pursue the national democratic revolution to its completion to be able to overthrow the ruling classes and the semi-colonial, semi-feudal system. Then the people, especially the basic masses, can start working together to achieve a socialist future. ▲

MAINSTREAM

Developments in the people's movement

FIREFIGHT IN PURA, TARLAC:

VICTORY for the NPA, Shameful DEFEAT for the AFP

ON OCTOBER 11, a 20-man unit of the New People's Army (NPA) under the Nelson Mesina Command in Tarlac waged a three-hour defensive battle against the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The latter was at least 250 in number, supported by two helicopter gunships, several tanks and machine guns, as well as two sniffing dogs.

Despite the enemy's immense fire and manpower, the Red fighters slipped through the military dragnet. The gunbattle that started at 3 p.m. was over for the NPA by 6:30 p.m.

But not for the AFP.

Preparing for battle

As early as 5:45 am, the NPA platoon that stayed the night in Sitio Umangan, Barangay Balite, Pura, Tarlac had already received word from the village folk that soldiers had arrived a few *sitios* away and had surrounded several houses while guarding all roads leading to the village. By 7:15, the red fighters that the government soldiers had put blocking forces at Linao, Maungib and Poblacion (the town center).

The comrades, who were on overnight watch, also reported that the cows fidgeted and dogs barked all through the night. Ka Omar, the platoon CO, knew it could only be due to human presence.

At 9 a.m. however, word came that the soldiers had left. The enemy's assault team in fact had filed out of the area but was just three houses away from where one NPA squad was located.

Throughout this period, the platoon was on red alert, ready for battle. All three squads reviewed battle plans and discussed withdrawal routes and rallying points.

In his report, Ka Omar said, "We made the discussion on what each fighter should do as detailed as possible.



We also discussed the tactics and techniques the enemy usually employed during fighting and how these could be neutralized."

Ka Omar reported that the fighters' morale was very high, based on their enthusiastic reactions during the briefing.

"*Hindi maiaalis ang takot at pag-aalangan pero mahigpit ang mga tagubilin at detalyado ang gagawin ng bawat isa. Napakahalaga ng detalye sa pagharap sa kaaway*, (It was normal to feel fear and apprehension but strict guidelines were issued and the task of each person was detailed. Detailed instructions are important when facing the enemy)," he said.

Outmaneuvering the enemy

At 1 p.m., they received information that the soldiers had returned. Slowly, the unit moved to a better position, hidden by the tall and lush sugarcanes.

Apparently, the soldiers were thinking of positioning themselves in the same area in order to assault a cluster of houses where they thought the Red fighters were. Although the first shot was fired by a soldier who was surprised by the guerrillas, the latter quickly responded and felled three Scout Rangers in the first volley of shots. After 30 minutes, the commander of the assaulting Scout Rangers was also killed causing the enemy's fighting spirit and capacity to weaken.

The three-hour fighting was characterized by selective

and well-aimed shots on the part of the NPA. The soldiers on the other hand were firing too high, showing they did not know where their targets were or were too rattled to aim well.

At one point, members of the first squad heatedly exchanged words with the other side, repulsing the enemy's attempt at psychological warfare. Soldiers, who were only 40 meters away, said the guerrillas should surrender because they were already running out of ammunition. The comrades laughed, knowing that the soldiers couldn't even pinpoint their exact location.

Just before 5 p.m., a helicopter gunship arrived and circled the area. The soldiers cheered. However, when one of the NPA squad leaders released a volley of gunfire and hit the helicopter, it retreated.

Throughout the fighting, information from the masses regarding enemy troop movements in the surrounding area were continuously being received by the NPA, enabling the command to map out an effective withdrawal route.

At 5:20, rain poured. Many of the soldiers and their officers left their position to take shelter. The NPAs took the opportunity to maneuver out of the area, aided by the gathering darkness and heavy rains. By past 8 p.m., they were out of the eight-hectare sugarcane plantation.

Not a single Red fighter was killed, wounded nor captured. On the other hand, 14 soldiers were killed and many more were wounded.

Saving face

Later, the Red fighters learned that soldiers from the Army's 69th, 70th and 71st Infantry Battalions, and the 703rd Brigade; 312nd, 313rd and 126th Philippine National Police (PNP) Mobile Group and local police units of Pura, Paniqui, Gerona and Ramos were used in the failed operation, with ample reinforcements from Fort Magsaysay in Nueva Ecija. Newspaper reports confirmed the heavy presence of government troops.

When the assault started, the AFP's Northern Luzon Command expected an easy victory. It was, after all, just a small NPA platoon encircled by soldiers in an isolated sugarcane field. How could they possibly lose? So confident was the AFP that it even allowed journalists from major television networks to cover the assault.

At 7 a.m. the following day, convinced that they still had the guerrillas encircled, the military used two Huey helicopters to drop bombs on the field. Then, it forced all residents to board military trucks and took them to a school in the town center. The village folk were instructed, however, to leave the doors of their houses unlocked. The houses were later ransacked and illegally searched by the military.

Even the children who were in school when the assault started were made to stay overnight in the school. Residents were allowed to return only the following day, October 13. To their dismay, they found out that their

kitchens had been raided, the contents of their refrigerators and rice bins gone.

According to the residents, they could still hear the soldiers firing when they got home but there was no return fire. The residents knew that the NPA had already eluded the encirclement. A few residents, who were amused at the blind pursuit operations, taunted the soldiers.

For three days however, Sitio Umangan was turned by the military into a "no man's land," preventing the entry of any person, even those residing there.

Later, in a statement, the National Democratic Front of the Philippines – Central Luzon (NDFP-CL) condemned the violation of several provisions of the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) by the AFP and PNP. The NDFP accused the military of controlling the movement of residents, forcibly evacuating and concentrating the residents in the barrio school premises. It also deplored the illegal searches conducted and the bombing of the sugarcane field.

On the other hand, the military officers heading the operations namely, Lt. Col. Ricardo Visaya of the 69th IB PA, Col. Pedro Curva of the 703rd Brigade PA, Esperon of the 7th ID PA, and Major Cristobal of the Scout Rangers, must have felt embarrassed. Not only did they fail to kill or capture a single Red fighter, they also lost several men.

To save face, the military spokesmen and officials declared to the media that the AFP's Northern Luzon Command has "foiled a plan of the New People's Army to attack civilian and military targets in Central Luzon," killing seven NPA fighters in the process. As proof, it showed a camouflaged truck which the NPA was supposedly planning to use to attack military and police facilities in Pura, Guimba and Gerona. Lt. Gen. Romeo B. Dominguez, NOLCOM commander who spoke during a press conference, could not present the seven dead guerrillas. Instead he assured reporters that "civilian witnesses saw the bodies being dragged by their fleeing comrades."

It took one week before the military operations stopped. The military set up checkpoints throughout Tarlac and even in the nearby provinces of Nueva Ecija and Pampanga. Civilians complained of intermittent firing by elements of the 69th IB PA. "*Parang bagong taon,*" (It's like New Year's day) said barrio folks from Guimba, Nueva Ecija.

While government troops were busy conducting pursuit operations, the NPA unit involved was already in a safe place, resting and assessing the weaknesses and strengths of their maneuvers, taking to heart the lessons they identified. Foremost among the lessons learned was that revolutionary determination, correct battle tactics, firm discipline and the masses' warm support could turn what could be a crushing defensive fight into revolutionary victory. ▲ (By Juan Victor)

PHILIPPINE HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY: **Back on Track**

By Juan Victor

“Neutrality serves the oppressor and never the oppressed; silence encourages the tormentor and not the tormented.” (Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize awardee)

Years of open terror

Widespread terror followed President Ferdinand Marcos's imposition of martial rule in 1972. Tens of thousands of Filipinos became victims of indiscriminate arrest and imprisonment. Extra-judicial killings and political abduction of activists by state agents became common news.

The Philippine human rights movement was the ray of light that illuminated those dark, traumatic years.

Before martial law, the Movement of Concerned Citizens for Civil Liberties (MCCCL), a broad alliance led by the late Senator Lorenzo Tañada, was formed when the US-Marcos regime suspended the writ of habeas corpus to suppress the national democratic movement and all other opposition. The MCCCL fiercely opposed martial rule.

Within the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), which was formally established a few months after martial law declaration, the Christians for National Liberation (CNL) mobilized leaders and members of the religious sector to defend human rights and counter the support of the institutional church to the fascist regime.

The persistence of CNL members pushed the Association of Major Religious Superiors of the Philippines (AMRSP) to conduct a survey of the current state of human rights and eventually form the Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP) in 1974. With the support of the revolutionary movement in the regions, TFDP expanded and set up offices nationwide.



From simply locating arrested persons, informing their families and following up their cases, TFDP's work evolved into more systematic reporting of cases of torture, salvaging and involuntary disappearance. This expanded later to include cases affecting groups of individuals or whole communities such as massacres, forced evacuations and food blockades.

Soon, other human rights organizations and institutions sprouted, among them: Free Legal Assistance Group (FLAG), an organization of human rights lawyers established by the late Sen. Jose W. Diokno shortly upon his release from prison; *Kapatid* (literally meaning sibling) for relatives of political prisoners (1976); Ecumenical Movement for Justice and Peace (EMJP), a multi-sectoral alliance against militarization (1979); Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance (FIND) for relatives of abduction victims (1986); Samahan ng mga Ex-Detainee Laban sa Detensyon at Amnestiya (SELDA) for former political prisoners (1986); MARTIR for relatives of salvaged victims; and Medical Action Group (MAG) which provided medical services to torture victims and other rights abuse victims.

The upsurge in the anti-fascist movement in the mid-70s proved that the US-Marcos ruling clique failed to stem the raging national democratic struggle. In 1975, the historic La Tondeña strike broke the dictator's ban on strikes, while the urban poor and student movements continued.

In 1976, the first major hunger strike by political prisoners was launched to demand the release of women detainees and to protest intolerable prison conditions. Another hunger strike was held the following year, timed to coincide with the World Peace through Law

Conference, an international activity hosted by the Marcos regime. The political prisoners released a statement detailing the torture they suffered and forcing the dictator to be on the defensive in his speech.

From 1978 to 1984, political detainees launched five hunger strikes including one during the Papal visit in 1981. These resulted in the release of several detainees and national and international exposure of human rights abuses under Marcos.

By this period, human rights organizations have started to reach out to international human rights and solidarity groups. On October 29 to November 3, 1980, the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal Session on the Philippines was held in Antwerp, Belgium. The tribunal criticized the reliance of the Marcos dictatorship on "permanent" martial law and its numerous blatant abuses of state power, recognizing the validity of the armed revolutionary struggle.

Nationally coordinated human rights campaigns also became possible with a nationwide network of human rights organizations, institutions and advocates. Free committees such as the Free Jose Ma. Sison and Free Satur Ocampo Committees were formed to gather support.

As the economic crisis worsened, the people's struggle also heightened. Protest actions spread in urban centers and the countryside opposing the Marcos dictatorship. At the same time, cracks between factions of the ruling elite widened when even the interest of some sections of the ruling class were affected by Marcos's unabashed "kleptocracy." The early '80s saw the US-Marcos clique pushed to greater isolation.

The human rights movement was an integral part of the surging people's democratic movement, playing a key



(OPPOSITE PAGE) The brutalities of martial law gave birth to a vibrant and militant human rights advocacy. (LEFT) Journalists Luis Beltran and Armando Malay, both victims of illegal detention, were among the active members of Selda, a group of former political detainees

role in unmasking the fascist regime and its atrocities. The national democratic movement vigorously defended human rights, its forces receiving the main brunt of the fascist attacks.

When the dictatorship had opposition leader Ninoy Aquino assassinated in 1983, the open protest movement exploded in intensity and breadth. The murder brought to focus other state-sponsored killings, including the killings of national democratic leaders such as tribal leader Macliing Dulag, moderate-turned-radical Edgar Jopson and revolutionary doctors Bobby dela Paz and Juan Escandor. Other human rights abuses, many even more brutal and massive, such as the massacre of entire families or forced evacuation of clusters of villages, were exposed.

By 1986, the people had had enough. The years of struggle against the Marcos dictatorship culminated in the first People Power that was fueled primarily by anti-fascist sentiments.

Delusions

The ouster of Marcos, however, failed to bring an end to human rights violations. The assumption to power of Ninoy Aquino's wife Cory, at first received ecstatically by the public, only built illusions that soon crumbled, albeit not quickly enough.

The newly seated Aquino government implemented a series of actions that seemingly promoted human rights. It released a sizeable number of political prisoners, created the Presidential Commission of Human Rights (PCHR) with well-known civil libertarian Jose W. Diokno as head, and appointed several human rights lawyers and advocates in various government posts.

The ruling Aquino faction was forced to give these few concessions in response to public expectations. These and the euphoria over the ouster of Marcos bolstered the illusion that justice could now be served to the victims of human rights violations. After all, was not Aquino herself a victim?

Aquino also opened negotiations with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP), which paved the way for the first-ever ceasefire between the New People's Army (NPA) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The government, however, cleverly used it for intelligence and psychological warfare operations, preparing the ground for vicious attacks against the revolutionary movement once the peace talks ended.

Some sectors, notably the emerging popular democrats, also misread the Aquino regime as a rainbow coalition consisting of liberal democrats as well as rightists.

All these delusions affected some segments of the human rights movement. For even when public euphoria over people power was still high, peasants in the countryside continued to receive rifle butt blows, combat boot kicks and deadly bullets from the AFP. The most prominent cases of salvaging, massacre and forcible evacuation at the time occurred in Marag Valley in Cagayan, which the military mercilessly pounded with mortar bombs. The military operation, dubbed "Oplan Salidumay," killed thousands of children, women and men.

By March 1987, a year after she ascended the throne of power, Aquino revealed her reactionary color. She openly declared her "total war" policy against the people which meant an all-sided approach to counterrevolutionary campaigns. This featured various strategies, from the



(LEFT) Innocent children of Marag Valley in Cagayan were among the victims of Corazon Aquino's "Total war"; (ABOVE) Aquino, who proved to be no different from Marcos, salutes her troops

formation of special operations teams (SOTs) that conducted psy-war operations in the barrios to the gradual constriction strategy that sought to annihilate the NPA. According to reports, Aquino's total war resulted in the displacement of more than 1.2 million peasants.

But the delusions on the improved human rights situation and the Aquino government were not brought on by developments in the external conditions alone. More importantly, they emerged because of weaknesses in the understanding and analysis of the changes in the political situation.

Such weakness was very evident in how human rights organizations responded to two important developments during the period. First is the intensified local and international pressure for human rights organizations to be "neutral." Because they had become dependent on foreign funding, human rights organizations were vulnerable to pressures by international organizations with bourgeois concepts of human rights and shallow understanding of the Filipino people's condition and struggle.

It was in this period when an NPA unit accidentally killed several persons in Digos. The NPA admitted responsibility and apologized for the tragic event. Not surprisingly, the Aquino administration cleverly manipulated the incident to put the national democratic movement on the defensive. The TFDP, one of the major human rights formations then, took the bait, coming out with a paper entitled "So You May Know." It defended itself at the expense of the people's movement, explaining that its mandate comes from international human rights norms and concepts and that atrocities committed by the revolutionary movement, including armed tactical offensives, fall under the category of crimes and subject to the Penal Code. The paper disregarded the historical and social conditions that gave rise to the armed revolution being waged by the NPA, whose many fighters willingly offer their lives for the attainment of human rights, justice and national democracy.

The second factor was the decision of progressive groups to boycott the 1985 snap elections. Some individuals felt that the decision painted its advocates Red, just as the AFP's psy-war operations intended. Forces in the human rights movement thus kept their distance from known ND organizations to prevent themselves from being lumped together with boycott advocates. It came to a point that human rights organizations decided to stay away from the campaigns being launched by Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (Bayan), which the AFP tirelessly attacked in anti-Red campaigns.

The ND groups later acknowledged that it erred in boycotting the elections, failing to read the people's pulse, which viewed the electoral contest as an extension of the anti-dictatorship struggle. The long and valiant of struggle

by the ND movement against the fascist dictatorship, however, could never be denied and negated by the mistake that was the election boycott. But sadly, some cadres blew it out of proportion, negatively affecting human rights cadres among others.

Off course

The disorientation among human rights organizations and cadres manifested itself in the course of struggle pursued by human rights organizations. The major indicators included the following:

- Delinking from the over-all revolutionary movement. Some elements from the human rights organizations, a number of them occupying leadership positions, distanced themselves from the broader, militant people's movement. They were arrogant enough to claim that they had built by themselves a distinct human rights movement which was broader and separate from the national democratic movement. They also refused to launch campaigns with other ND organizations for fear of being labeled Red.
- Priority given to office work over political, ideological and organizational consolidation. The mistaken idea that work in the institution comprised the entire political work prospered. Education work that could have helped sharpen analysis of the unfolding political developments was utterly neglected.
- Allowing foreign funding agencies and the democratic facades of the Aquino and Ramos regimes to trap them into "objectivity," "neutrality" and pragmatism. They decided to develop closer links with government in order to intensify their lobbying efforts, placing emphasis on legalistic methods rather than on the mass movement, a shift in methods well applauded by the donor agencies.
- Embracing bourgeois liberalism by limiting the struggle for human rights within the framework of international human rights instruments. This showed the inability of human rights organizations to define their role in the post-Marcos struggle and steered them farther away from the struggle of the basic sectors. The role of the human rights movement in the fight against the oppression and exploitation brought about by imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism was forgotten.
- Failure to facilitate the reintegration of released political prisoners and other victims of human rights abuses to the mainstream of people's struggle, including ensuring their and their

relatives' political consolidation. What prevailed was concern for their short-term welfare and benefits. As a result, the financial support (for food and livelihood projects) given them only served to foster dependency and economism.

- NGOism, bureaucratism and employee mentality. Efforts to improve methods and style of work and to get more financial support from the funders to improve volunteer allowances and working conditions fell into the trap of capitalist management methods which fostered instead NGOism and bureaucratism. It included the creation of several layers of management; payment of salaries to hitherto volunteer workers motivated by their commitment to human rights and the national democratic struggle; and the use of time cards, organizational sanctions and salary deductions, instead of ensuring political and ideological consolidation to improve performance and deepen commitment.

The system bred human rights "activists" who joined human rights institutions for relatively higher income and, to protect their employment, preferred staying in the office than going out protesting in the streets. Many of them refused to perform other political tasks using the program requirements of the institution as excuse. They avoided being identified as part of the ND movement.

- Over-reliance on foreign funds as the institutions' operational costs increased, the spirit of volunteerism declined and human rights work deteriorated.

When the Second Great Rectification Movement was launched in 1992, the factionalists, who refused to acknowledge the problems that beset the revolutionary movement and sought to discredit its leadership, found it easy to deceive many members and leaders of human rights organizations. The lack of consolidation and unchecked erroneous analysis of the post-Marcos political situation made the latter vulnerable to intrigues and misrepresentation.

Painful schism

When the rectification movement started, a group of factionalists tried to legitimize and reinvent themselves by digging in within the human rights organizations they were connected with. They later claimed exclusive rights over these organizations and projected themselves locally and internationally as advancing the only genuine human rights movement.

They arrogated among themselves the titles of Board members, executive directors and consultants of human

rights organizations. From these organizations they attacked the revolutionary movement and the legal democratic movement to further their careers, corner positions in international human rights groups, and attract funds from agencies abroad.

One of their ringleaders, Ramon Casiple later repackaged himself as a political analyst from the Institute of Political Reforms.

He and his accomplices persisted in the erroneous concept of human rights as supra-class and that the human rights movement should therefore not have a class bias, not even for the poor. They claimed that it should be independent and neutral, subverting the years of experience in human rights struggle which was waged as part of the national democratic struggle. Their so-called "neutral" stance was meant to conceal their swing from a revolutionary, progressive viewpoint and standpoint to that of a discreditable reactionary with progressive pretensions.

They propagated their distorted picture of the issue to allies of the ND movement. Human rights organizations that refused to recognize the authority of the Casiple faction were branded in public as "pro-Sison."

They soon came out with statements criticizing the NDFP for "untimely and unprecedented demand" for recognition of its authority to issue safe-conduct passes in NPA-controlled areas. It also viewed as incorrect NDFP's insistence that Sotero Llamas, who was among those issued by the government safety and immunity guarantee, be released.

And because of their shallow, empiricist analysis of political developments and self-serving positions, they declared themselves "critical but open" to the reactionary state. Citing statistics of documented violations that were never deeply studied, they claimed that human rights violations had decreased and, therefore, the human rights situation had improved.

Human rights groups under the factionalists today have practically disappeared from the political scene, floundering as they have long lost their political moorings and are reduced to sending representatives to international conferences to justify their relevance. Once in a while, they dishonestly report human rights cases and struggles in areas influenced by the NDFP for funding purposes.

Resurgence

Because of their shallow analysis and reactionary standpoint, these human rights organizations eventually became useless locally. They vainly attempted to come up with indicators for respect for or violations of economic, social and cultural rights devoid of the realities of imperialist, feudal and semi-feudal oppression and exploitation in the country.

But internationally, they continue to reap the gains of

their swing to the right. They identify themselves with so-called civil society. While trying to appear critical of imperialist globalization and its effects on people's rights, they merely seek to present themselves as representatives of the people to gain crumbs from imperialist institutions. Their calls never go beyond asking for safety nets for the oppressed and exploited peoples of the world.

Locally, the dearth left by their selling out to reactionaries caused the emergence of genuine human rights organizations, which are integral to the legal democratic movement.

During the years 1994-95 new organizations had been set up to respond to the continuing violations of human rights while old ones, which refused to be pressured by Casiple and his ilk had to be rejuvenated and redirected. Discussions regarding the importance and place of human rights advocacy within the legal democratic movement, in particular, and the national democratic struggle, in general, were conducted thereby laying the foundations for a stronger advocacy for people's rights. As these human rights groups strengthened, new leaders emerged and an enthusiastic network of allies developed.

By 1996, a new alliance emerged withstanding the maneuvers and smear campaign of factionalists.

Even the victims and their relatives who at first sided with the factionalists for fear of losing financial support eventually realized that their struggle for justice is inextricably linked with the national democratic struggle.

Among the issues these new and re-energized human rights organizations first responded to was the hanging of overseas worker Flor Contemplacion and the peace negotiations between the NDFP and the Ramos government. Bringing the issue of political prisoners on the peace negotiating table paved the way for the release of 42 detainees. To help project the issue of unjust political detention, political prisoners from more than 30 detention centers nationwide launched a coordinated hunger strike which was timed with the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1995.

When the Ramos regime attempted to further institutionalize state terrorism through an anti-terror bill and implement a national identification system, human rights groups immediately responded. They also launched a campaign to prosecute the killers of labor leader Rolando Olalia and Leonor Alay-ay who were murdered by the military in 1986. It was also during this period that human rights groups received various SOS calls from urban poor families being violently evicted.

Under the Estrada regime, progressive human rights groups took up the cudgel for war-torn Mindanao after the regime launched a series of bombings and killings in Muslim south. Now, under President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the policy of war in Mindanao persists and the struggle for justice and peace for Mindanaoans continues.



The challenge of reviving the human rights movement and making it once again serve the masses, especially the victims of state repression, was met competently and triumphantly. The challenge however does not stop here.

At present, the AFP is implementing a sophisticated counter-revolutionary campaign and, as usual, riding roughshod over the civil and political rights of civilians and captured suspected NPAs. Worse, military operations, especially in certain areas such as the Mindoro Island, have surpassed the AFP's brutality in the past.

Military rule exists in the countryside devastating even legitimate people's organizations and human rights advocates. Added to this, the intensified war of aggression of US imperialism and its direct and armed military intervention in the country have created new complications and greater intensity to human rights violations.

Changes in the national and world situation have given rise to developments that directly concern human rights advocates and the entire national democratic forces. But with the confidence that the rectification movement has imparted and the deeper commitment that renewed links with the masses have molded, the struggle for people's rights, in general, and human rights, in particular, will continue to effectively confront any immediate and long-term challenge. ▲

The picture of communists that the reactionaries want to paint is either that of an old man, half-blind and bent to the waist, clinging to an “obsolete” ideology, or of a ruthless man with a moustache a la Hitler, holding a knife stained with blood (a civilian or comrade’s, whichever they fancy at the moment).

The truth is, many young men and women are embracing communism, including persons who reactionaries would consider “successful.” To get to know them better, Liberation had a chat with three of them and asked about their transformation, families and even their favorite books.

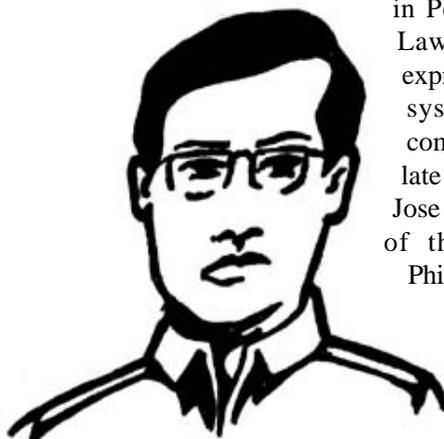
3 Young Communists

Arnold:
I’m an activist who just happens to be a lawyer

ARNOLD WAS ALREADY IN LAW SCHOOL WHEN HE BECAME AN ACTIVIST. He volunteered to serve as a paralegal in a community youth organization and, later, in labor organizations. He assisted student leaders and union organizers who were being harassed by the school administration and company owners.

This exposure to political oppression gave him a critical view of the Philippine justice system. By the time he entered law school, he already understood that the courts exist basically to defend private property and other privileges of the elite.

It was not surprising then that he got lower grades in subjects that tend to support the structure, such as Taxation and Laws on Succession. He, however, got better grades in Political Law and Constitutional Law, subjects that allowed him to express his ideas about changing the system. And his thesis? It was a comparison of the ideologies of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos and of Jose Maria Sison, founding chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines.



Lawyers like him are not easy to organize, admits Arnold. “Lawyers’ lifestyles are decadent and their

success measured by the ‘Phd’ attached to their names, the kind of schools their children attend, the posh locations of their law firm, and how many big-name clients they have,” he explained. To convince them to give up all these takes intense ideological re-orientation.

He also said that the moment he enters law school, a law student is trained for his role in the system – to mediate and resolve disputes through the courts; to promote the clash of reasons, not arms. “In essence,” said Arnold, “he is trained to become an apologist of the ruling system and his natural tendency is to defend it.”

On the other hand, he cites some positive points: law students are made to accept certain bourgeois liberal concepts like the idea of equality for all regardless of race, religion and class.

For Arnold and other progressive lawyers, success in their profession is measured by how their law training is being used to help the poor and majority of the people.

How were you recruited? The truth is, I was invited three times. I’ve always had high respects for the Party but during the first two, I was still not ideologically prepared... I still had the typical lawyer’s attitude of not wanting to be confined in a box.

What differentiates a communist from other members of the protest movement? In practice and in theory, he embraces MLM (Marxist, Leninist and Maoist) principles. They are evident in his actions, thoughts, views in life, relationships with other people and perception of society. The communist tries to adhere to stronger discipline and better work methods. In everything he does he tries to serve the Party and the people. He not only believes in armed struggle, he actively works for it, contributing directly and indirectly.

What is the use of practicing law if the justice system is so biased against the poor? A progressive lawyer understands that it is an instrument of the ruling class, the expression of prevailing dominant interest in the society. Despite this, the law still has its uses. It can be used to defend the poor – using their (the reactionaries’) own laws to defeat them. Second, the accumulated law training and the frustration and failures in the reactionary courts can be used to help design an alternative justice system. If anything else, the injustices in the legal system motivate you to fight harder.

Is going to the hills an option for you? This is always an option, although I used to have a romanticized view of it. But right now it has become a distinct possibility with the way the situation is going. (Going to the hills will be) for two reasons: one, to help implement and further improve our revolutionary justice system – *at malakas ang hatak nito* (and this is a big motivating factor); two, the need for more cadres and members to go to the countryside.

Perhaps there will come a time when there will be no room to think because it will be the only option available. But before that time comes, there are still a lot of things that can be done here, from courtroom battles to research.

How do you see yourself 10 years from now? Kung di ako makanal, madiskaril mula sa tuluy-tuloy na pagpapanibagong hubog (If I don’t get sidetracked from continuously remoulding myself)... kung panalo na, pihong maraming trabaho kaya kailangang tumulong sa pag-aayos. Kung di pa panalo, umiikot pa rin sa kung ano ang political needs — gagamitin pa rin ang kasanayan, katapatan para makapagbigay benepisyo sa anakpawis. Di lang nasa korte, nasa kalsada rin (If by then the revolution has been won, there will surely be a lot of work in reconstruction where help will be needed. If we have not yet achieved victory, my work will revolve around the political needs —utilizing my capabilities and commitment in serving the masses. Nor only in the courts but in the streets as well)

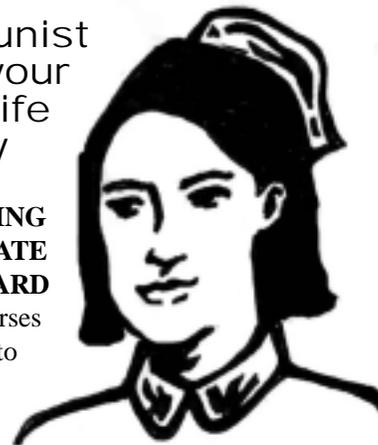
But I will always see myself not as a lawyer who became an activist but as an activist who just happens to be a lawyer. (By Juan Victor)

Sandra:
Being a communist
means giving your
best and your life
to your country

SANDRA, 29, IS A NURSING GRADUATE FROM A STATE UNIVERSITY AND A BOARD TOPNOTCHER. When nurses in the country are choosing to leave for Canada and other countries to earn dollars, Sandra chose the revolution.

Sandra joined the underground movement while in college. Her understanding of Philippine society deepened when she joined a rural integration program sponsored by a service institution. Her experience firmed up her decision to work in a non-government health institution after school. Later, she decided to work fulltime in the underground.

Sandra considers herself successful, both in her personal life and underground work. She said she passed through a difficult stage of reconciling her personal success with being a revolutionary. She is more proud and grateful, however, of the things she has achieved in the movement. She learned how to design and implement



campaign plans, analyze issues and situations, organize fellow health professionals and workers, and many things else. She said the movement has helped develop her many potentials.

Next year, Sandra's high school batch will be holding a reunion. She believes she has gone through more and can do much more than most of her batch mates.

What movies do you watch? You can never make me watch any James Bond film. I hate its anti-communist undertones. I also can't stand mushy films and rags-to-riches or the-princess-waiting-for-her-prince storylines.

What kind of books do you read? I don't have any particular preference for books and authors. I read progressive books and any that interest me. Recently, I enjoyed reading the four volumes of Harry Potter.

What else do you do in your spare time? I watch movies or cartoon shows. If I happen to be home early, I watch the *teleserye* (television series) marathon in Channel 2. I know all about Madam Claudia and Amor Powers. I have, however, a limited tolerance threshold. I just go to my room whenever I have had enough of them.

What do you think of relationships in the movement?

Relationships in the movement are different and many degrees better than any bourgeois relationship. The right of all sexes is respected. A woman comrade can court a male comrade. Gay rights are also respected. In the movement, collectives help nurture and give revolutionary perspective to relationships. It is more inspiring because your partner shares the same cause and vision of the future. I know because I had also gone through a bourgeois relationship.

Do you wear the typical "tibak"(activist) attire? No more. *Tibak* attires like mojos, campaign t-shirts and tubao are too noticeable.

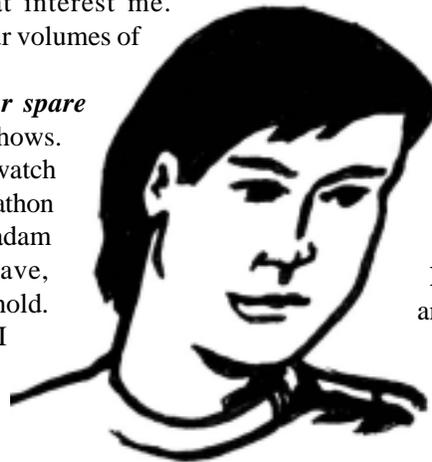
How do you picture yourself 10 years from now? Honestly, I can't tell. Where I will be depends on the conditions. Everything can change. But in the next five years, my future husband and I plan to request for redeployment in one of the regions in the Visayas.

What is a communist? A communist sees and analyzes things and problems comprehensively and scientifically. Communists lead...To be a communist means giving your best, giving yourself to the country, to the people. It means being critical, taking initiatives, forging unities and taking action.

How do you feel whenever other people take potshots at communism, Jose Ma. Sison and the Party? My blood

pressure shoots up. Most times, I just keep silent although I'm really angry. But sometimes, I want to be pro-active, write a letter to the editor to express my views and help explain the issue.

What do you say to the statement that the Party is dying and that communism is passé? Only those who want to maintain the status quo or don't know any better say that. The teachings of Marx remain correct. It has been a hundred years now but Marx accurately analyzed the crisis of capitalism and foretold its demise... And look at how they continue to fail to crush the revolutionary movement. The revolution has been raging for more than 30 years now and it is still growing. Is this what "dying" and "passé" mean? (By Victoria Laktaw)



Jacinto:
The answer lies in transforming society

"TATAY (FATHER), WHY ARE WE POOR? HOW COME SOME PEOPLE HAVE CARS AND LOTS OF TOYS WHILE WE DON'T?" As a young boy, Jacinto often asked these questions.

He saw at a young age how society was divided between the rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless. He impatiently demanded an explanation from

his elders.

Jacinto was born to a peasant family and grew up working in the ricefields. After backbreaking toil, sore feet and hands, he wondered how come their share would only amount to a canful. When they moved to the city, he witnessed how his parents worked hard in the factory, rising up at the crack of dawn and coming home late in the evening. He thought them very, very hardworking but when Christmas came, all they had was a Christmas tree fashioned by his father from *walis tingting* (broomstick) and crepe paper.

Now in his 20s, Jacinto already knew the answers to his questions and has committed his life to building a classless society where nobody will be exploited. Jacinto is a communist. He joined the Party at the height of the second great rectification campaign and has selflessly worked to attain its grand vision.

Good looking, articulate and bubbling with intelligence and humor, Jacinto is far from the evil-looking communist caricatured by the reactionaries. But back in college, he was reluctant to join any activist organization, preferring to lead the carefree lifestyle of most teenagers. He was a consistent honor student in grade school and a government scholar in high school but soon got tired of the formal

classroom discussions. He cut classes and joined his fraternity brothers in search of adventures. One of them was a big rally against the United States military base.

A natural leader and fiery speaker, he was asked to run for a position in the student council where his involvement with the movement deepened. From advocating students' rights and welfare, Jacinto integrated with workers in picket lines and joined peasant rallies. He read a lot in his spare time and initiated discussions among the students. In theory and practice, he saw the necessity of waging a revolution to fight Philippine society's basic ills - imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism.

While in a countryside integration program, Jacinto witnessed an old peasant woman weep upon seeing NPA guerrillas. "We've been waiting for your return for a long time," she said as she welcomed them in her nipa hut. "You can't imagine all the hardships we've been through but it's okay now. You're here again." It was a recovery area located at the heart of a former regional base. She had enjoyed the fruits of the Party's agrarian revolution program before the split. This dramatic encounter, according to Jacinto, will be forever etched in his mind - a reminder of the correctness of the revolution.

What movies do you watch? I don't go to the cinema to watch a movie. It stinks inside, the floor is either sticky or slippery. The place is congested and the air circulation is poor. It's the best place to contract colds or other communicable diseases. Aside from that, it's expensive. I watch borrowed VCD's though.

I enjoy watching war films. One of my favorites is Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*. I find the samurai's code of loyalty, discipline and skills very fascinating. I also like *Braveheart* and *Jacob the Liar*. Of course, I hate pro-US imperialist war films like *Black Hawk Down*.

What books do you read? Sun Tzu's *Art of War*. I think it should be a required reading for all activists. I learned the art of psy-war through that book and how to plan battles. I am also a fan of Anne Rice. I've read her books on the entire vampire series.

What else do you do in your spare time? I play with the computer - strategy and fantasy games. Right now, I enjoy playing the SIMS. I also watch football games on cable TV. If the revolution succeeds, we should encourage Filipinos to engage in sports.

Do you wear the typical activist attire? No, I tried

"If through our collective action, we thwart a demolition or win a strike, at the end of the day, you see a smile on the *masa's* face. That to me is priceless."

wearing it once but I got itchy (laughs). It's true. I find the *tubao* irritating to the skin.

Wearing the generic *tibak* outfit to prove that you're an activist shows poor ideological grounding. You want to look like a proletariat. That's taking things too literally.

What to you is a communist? What is communism? An individual who aspires for genuine equality among people.

It's not that easy to explain communism. To the peasant, it has to be explained in the context of agrarian revolution. You start with the basic issues affecting their lives and you forge unity based on these issues. Then, you start explaining the national democratic program and your discussion gets deeper. You change their worldview and help them empower themselves.

Do communists believe in God? I believe in a liberating God.

How do you see yourself 10 years from now? In the countryside.

What is do you think of relationships in the movement? Sacred. Perhaps the most sacred thing in the movement.

On a personal level, how did the Party change you? I became closer to my family. I realized that to be poor is nothing to be ashamed of.

Was working for the revolution a difficult choice to make? I said to myself, what if I do get my family out of poverty? Sure, they will experience maybe 10 to 20 years of comfortable, even luxurious living. My parents are old, and then what? What about our other relatives who are also poor? What's going to happen to the children of my sibling, and their future grandchildren?

If the breadwinner dies and there's no equal opportunity for all, the cycle of poverty will haunt all generations in our family. We have to change the system. The answer lies in transforming society.

How would you measure success in the movement? If through our collective action, we thwart a demolition or win a strike, at the end of the day, you see a smile on the *masa's* face. That to me is priceless. It comes from the heart. It's not easy to win the trust of the masses. There is a history of class exploitation and betrayals and if they bestow it (their trust) on you that is the greatest reward one can get in this world. (*Jacinto Algarme is the former spokesperson of Balangay Gypsy Zabala, Kabataan Makabayan-NCR.*) (By Lito Lucero) ▲



ISNAYP: SHARP SHOOTERS

By Ama San Isidro

Like Red fighters of the New People's Army, they trek trails, climb mountain peaks, maintain underground operations and join tactical operations. But instead of being armed with high-powered rifles, they shoot using video cameras.

They are the video documentors of *Isnayp: Ang Rebolusyonaryong Midya ng Bikol* (Snipe: The Revolutionary Media of Bicol).

The group, which formally took shape in 2003, actually started shooting footages of the NPA and its revolutionary work in the countryside in 2001 when the Bicol region acquired its very first digital camera. The following year, a video camera followed, becoming the team's priceless "weapon."

Propagating revolutionary culture

Twenty-eight year old Anina, one of the "Isnayers," said the primary objective of their group is to use the different multi-media forms to propagate revolutionary culture. Its primary target audience are the Red fighters and workers and peasants who are bombarded daily by bourgeois and feudal culture and influence.

"There is a need to develop an alternative and progressive culture," said Anina. Thus, producing multi-media materials and making them available to the masses is one of Isnayp's tasks.

"Propaganda and education work should correspond to the needs of the national democratic revolution that continues to surge forward," Anina added. This means Isnayp's outputs must reflect the issues that the movement confront at a given period and explain the revolutionary alternatives.

Video documentaries are the latest of the forms that



Isnayp has adopted. They have proven to be an effective medium for propaganda work, especially among those who are unable to read or have no time or patience to go through voluminous papers to study an issue. While producing them may take some time depending on the topic, they can be shown to a large number of audience and reproduced and distributed widely.

Video documentaries have thus become a vital tool in transforming social culture, serving as an instrument to propagate revolutionary views and positions on issues.

For comrades like the Isnayers, the form gives them artistic space, allowing them to experiment with various creative presentations, from the written script to the issues' audio-visual presentation.

Before making video documentaries, the Isnayers have already experienced using other forms of revolutionary propaganda, such as the publication of *Silyab* (spark), a quarterly newsletter; production of *Dagundong ng Bikol* (thunder in Bicol), a quarterly taped radio program; and the writing of *Punla* (Seed), an underground literary folio. They have also performed in cultural presentations in rural communities in the region.

Candid and Factual

A video production entitled "A Day in the Life of an NPA Guerilla" was their first output, according to Lani, also of Isnayp. In doing the production, they had to integrate with an NPA unit. They shot footages of the

NPA guerrillas while they went through their everyday life: cooking, bathing, conducting political education among the masses, working in the fields, cleaning their firearms and preparing to go to sleep.

“*Talagang pumapakat kami* (We really integrate with them),” Lani said. She narrated how they have since experienced living with guerillas and masses in Bicol’s different guerilla fronts.

Their mode of work is strikingly different from that of mainstream video groups. Lani explained how mainstream video groups usually start from conceptualization then planning the scenes based on their script. But with Isnayp, they take footages of the actual events. “We do not try to create scenarios that would look good on video,” Lani said, adding that the objective condition in a specific place or event would always look good on video anyway because they are actual events of the rich life of the masses, Red fighters and Party cadres.

While the usual process of video documentation starts with pre-production that includes writing a script, Isnappers work with a specific topic in mind and shoot footages on what actually happens when they get to the place.

“*Walang drowing* (No staged shots),” they stressed.

“Our documentaries are given a unique perspective when we work without a script and we do not know what shots we would get,” Anina said, to which Lani added that their output is usually based on what actually happens and not what the video group would want to happen.

“*Hindi ang video group ang nagtatakda kung ano ang mangyayari kaya nabubuo lamang ang storya mula sa kung ano lamang ang nangyari* (It is not the video group that dictates the story but the story unfolds based on what actually happens),” Lani explained.

This is true especially if they are requested to cover an NPA unit’s tactical offensive. Anina and Lani said they were with the Romullo Jallores Command during several tactical offensives, including the one wherein the NPA captured two prisoners of war, 1Lt. Ronaldo Fidelino, commanding officer of the Charlie Coy of the 42nd IB, and Pfc. Roniel Nemenio on March 1 this year.

Isnayp’s footage of the offensive was factual and rare. From there, Isnayp documented the NPA treatment of the POWs; their activities and conditions during captivity; and their eventual release. Isnayp has produced two video documentaries on the capture that have been released to different media establishments. It will release its next project in a few weeks, a documentary on the revolutionary justice system which has actually never been tackled before in any video production.

Expert amateurs

Even after coming out with two music videos, *Martsa kan Bikolandia* (The March of the Bicolandia) and



Manggagawang

Pangkultura (Cultural

Workers), an audio-visual presentation, *Sulo kan Bicol* (Torch of Bicol), a news video, *Isnayp Balita on the POWs* (Isnayp News on the POWs), and two audio-visual documentaries, *Bagati: Sa bawat Hakbang ng Pulang Mandirigma* (Footsteps: In Every Step of the Red Fighter) and *Awit at Ngiti* (Song and Smile), the Isnappers feel that they are still amateurs who have yet to master the nitty-gritty of video documentation.

They recall how they started using the video camera in 2002 without any formal training. During the first quarter of 2003, a comrade, who has had experience with the craft, taught them the basics. Their training concentrated on the post-production process or editing because they had by then gathered several hours worth of video footages but did not know what to do with them.

Isnayp now has two video cameras and a simple editing machine that its members bring with them wherever they go.

Integrated

For Isnappers, what makes their task more exciting and challenging is the fact that while documenting a particular campaign, they are usually integrated with the front or unit in charge of the campaign. And since they are integrated with the guerillas, they have opportunities to integrate with the masses.

“*Yun ang nagpapataas ng moral namin* (That is what keeps our morale high),” both Lani and Anina said.

While assigned to a specific unit, they are also tasked to conduct political education among the masses and give cultural trainings to mass activists. They are usually requested to give cultural presentations during mass meetings and on special occasions like the Party anniversary.

The politically sharp and creative outputs of *Isnayp: Ang Rebulusyonaryong Media ng Bicol* should inspire propaganda and cultural groups from other regions to improve their ability to help create a culture that would continue to expose the enemies of the people; propagate the analysis, stand and strategies of the national democratic revolution; depict the lives and struggles of the masses; and advance a culture that is scientific, patriotic and mass-based. ▲

