

Filipino Elite Still in the Saddle **Not ‘People Power’, but Workers Power!**

“We love you, sir,” gushed George Bush after Ferdinand Marcos “won” the rigged Philippines presidential election of 1981 with a modest 88 percent of the vote. “We love your adherence to democratic principles and democratic processes.” But five years later, the Reaganites reluctantly concluded that time had run out for their model “democrat.” With an expanding leftist guerrilla insurrection and the Philippine economy in a tailspin, Marcos had become a liability U.S. imperialism could no longer afford.

In May 1985 CIA chief William Casey visited Marcos in Manila and bluntly demanded that the presidential election scheduled for 1987 be held immediately. A few months later, U.S. officials were publicly criticizing “the unwillingness of President Marcos to clean up the political system, professionalize the military and break up business monopolies.” In the State and Defense Departments there was acute worry over Marcos’ policies, which many predicted would “lead to a collapse in the Philippines and deal a blow to western interests” (*New York Times*, 31 October 1985). Among these cherished interests were \$3 billion of private American investment and two military bases of vital strategic significance in U.S. imperialism’s preparations for war against the Soviet Union.

Fearful that the guerrillas of the New People’s Army (NPA) would ultimately replace the butcher of Manila if the conflict between Marcos and his moderate bourgeois opponents had to be settled in the streets, Washington sought an “orderly” transition to a government more broadly representative of the Filipino elite. But the diseased despot of the Malacanang Palace refused to cooperate in dismantling his nepotistic regime. Instead, he called a snap election, hoping to capitalize on divisions in the opposition and his control of the media and army, to steal another vote and present Washington with a fait accompli.

It was a gamble that backfired. Intended only as a public relations hoax to get his imperial patron off his back, Marcos’ election gambit turned into a genuine political event. Opposition candidate Corazon Aquino’s rallies drew crowds of hundreds of thousands who enthusiastically applauded her promise to bring down the curtain on the despised dictator. Marcos countered with his usual tactics—bribery, fraud, intimidation and assassination—but as the campaign went on it became apparent that events had begun to slip beyond his control.

The vote settled nothing. Marcos proclaimed himself the winner but his opponents were in no mood to go home and wait for the next election. Aquino called for strikes, boycotts and civil disobedience as Marcos plotted a preemptive military strike against the opposition.

Reagan’s special envoy, Philip Habib, was on the scene in Manila, talking to both of the principals in an attempt to avoid a civil war. Habib also met with long-time Marcos backers Defense Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and Deputy Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos. A few hours later Enrile and Ramos declared for Aquino and called on the military to join them against their former boss.

Their call brought little initial response from the armed forces, but tens of thousands of unarmed civilians responded to the exhortations of the Catholic hierarchy to form a human wall around the rebel headquarters at Camp Crame. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, the Pentagon pressured every Philippine army commander they could get hold of to keep their troops off the streets. The turning point came when “loyalist” tanks sent to snuff out the revolt refused to open fire on the crowd around the Constabulary Headquarters. At that point, according to a senior American official, Marcos’ chief concern became “to make sure he did not leave with a bullet.” Too bad he didn’t.

The U.S. was a key player in the fall of the tyrant, but it did not write the script. The issue of who would end up in the presidential palace and who would be airlifted to Hawaii courtesy of the USAF was not decided in Washington but in the streets of Manila by the tens of thousands of ordinary citizens who risked their lives to be rid of Marcos.

Aquino’s “People Power”

Aquino’s “People Power” was intended by its clerical organizers to ensure that the massive hostility to Marcos did not spill over into a wholesale attack on privilege and property; but instead remained within the framework of a struggle to change the administrative personnel of the state. “People Power” was an instrument of those sections of the Philippine elite that resented Marcos and his clique of “cronies” treating the state as their own personal property.

The coalition which stood atop the “People Power” pyramid embraced the clerical hierarchy (a potent force in this 85 percent Catholic country), the commercial bourgeoisie of the Makati district, sections of the landholding hierarchy (represented by Aquino herself), and enjoyed the support of a sizeable portion of the middle and lower ranks of the officer corps.

The bourgeois class character of the new administration is apparent in Aquino’s cabinet choices. Her Vice President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister (and rival), Doy Laurel, was one of the few bourgeois oppositionists who did not suffer financially under the dictatorship. Jaime Ongpin, the new Finance Minister, is president of

one of the largest mining multinationals in the Philippines. The two leading military rebels, Ramos (Marcos' top cop throughout the martial law period) and Enrile (who was among the richest and most corrupt of the cronies) kept their jobs as armed forces chief of staff and defense minister respectively. They embody the continuity of the state, in particular the military, from Marcos to Aquino.

The new government is pledged to taking back a few of the holdings awarded to the cronies; reappropriating as much of Marcos' loot as it can locate; and returning the army and the rest of the state apparatus to the service of the entire ruling elite. But Aquino's "People Power" will do nothing to better the abysmal conditions of life for the 70 percent of the population who live in poverty. There are already indications that the illusions of last February are beginning to evaporate. In a speech delivered in mid-April, Vice President Laurel made reference to "deep grumblings sweeping across our land" (*New York Times*, 21 April).

But Washington has no complaints. The multinational investments remain secure as do the naval and air bases at Subic Bay and Clark Field. Aquino's victory has also kept the Filipino officer corps intact for its war on the NPA and has, at least temporarily, administered a major political setback to one of the world's largest leftist insurgencies. A State Department aide summed up the view from Washington: "We feel we're on a roll. Now we want to use that momentum and apply it to the *contras*."

American Imperialism's First Conquest

The U.S. role in the events of last February is only the latest chapter in almost ninety years of America's bloody colonial domination. At the turn of the century the Filipinos had the unfortunate distinction of being the first overseas victims of American capitalism in its imperialist "maturity." On 16 March 1898, the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations reported that "the creative energy of the American people can no longer be confined within the borders of the Union. Production has so outrun consumption in both agriculture and manufactured products that foreign markets must be secured or stagnation will ensue." Five weeks later the U.S. declared war on Spain—Cuba and the Philippines being the real estate up for grabs.

At that time the Filipinos were in the midst of a protracted war of national liberation against the Spanish. Initially the insurgent Filipinos welcomed the intervention of the U.S. military, but they soon discovered they had acquired a new and even more rapacious colonial master. The overwhelming military superiority of the U.S. and the savage policy of mass extermination of the indigenous population—a strategy which the U.S. Army had perfected during the genocidal wars of conquest against the Native American peoples—eventually drowned the rebellion in the blood of a quarter of a million Filipinos. Mark Twain commented sardonically that: "as for a flag for the Philippine Province, it is easily managed. We can have a special one—our states do it; we can have our usual flag, with the white stripes

painted black and the stars replaced by a skull and crossbones."

The national elite (the *ilustrados*) abandoned the fight early to sign on as junior partners in the new colonial arrangement. The result was a paradigm of the deforming effects produced by the forcible integration of semi-feudal societies into the imperialist world economy. As Trotsky noted in his 1940 article "Three Concepts of the Russian Revolution":

"historical backwardness does not mean a mere retracing of the course of the advanced countries a hundred or two hundred years late. Rather, it gives rise to an utterly different 'combined' social formation, in which the most highly developed achievements of capitalist technique and structure are integrated into the social relations of feudal and pre-feudal barbarism, transforming and dominating them, fashioning a unique relationship of classes."

A 1909 "free trade" agreement imposed by Washington transformed the Philippines into a producer of agricultural products for the U.S. and a tariff-free market for American manufactured goods. This effectively foreclosed the development of an indigenous manufacturing bourgeoisie and ensured a pattern of neo-colonial dependency which has continued to this day.

In the countryside farmland was increasingly concentrated in the hands of huge owners known as *hacenderos*, and many previously independent peasants were turned into sharecroppers. American agribusiness came to monopolize rubber, pineapple and banana output as well as big chunks of other specialized agricultural production.

Japanese Occupation and the War Against the Huks

American rule was briefly interrupted by Japanese occupation from 1942-44. The Philippine elite easily adjusted to a new imperialist master. The puppet government set up by the Japanese was headed by Doy Laurel's father; Cory Aquino's father-in-law served as a cabinet minister. In the countryside the People's Anti-Japanese Army, or Hukbalahap, mobilized tens of thousands under Communist Party (PKP) leadership in a rebellion aimed at securing national independence and distributing the land to those who worked it. While the Aquinos and Laurels were serving the Japanese, the Huks inflicted 20,000 casualties on the occupation forces and their native collaborators.

In 1944 the U.S. Army, led by Douglas MacArthur, began the reconquest of the Philippines. Two years later, on July 4, U.S. President Harry Truman signed a proclamation of neo-colonial "independence" for the Philippines. "National freedom" was backed up by legislation providing for American training of the Philippine armed forces, free entry of U.S. imports for a period of eight years and a constitutional guarantee of equal property rights for U.S. citizens. In 1947, with the Cold War heating up, the United States extorted 99-year leases on fifteen military bases from its vassal. Eisenhower's secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, with unintended irony, proclaimed the Philippines "a symbol of how the West can create independence in Asia."

The continuing efforts of the displaced landlords—

backed by the U.S.—to reverse the agrarian reforms instituted by the Huks during the war, and the exclusion of duly elected PKP supporters from the National Assembly, touched off a renewed period of armed struggle which raged from 1948 to 1955. A CIA-organized counterinsurgency campaign, combining military pressure with “psychological warfare” (centered on empty promises of significant land reform), broke the back of the revolt. In 1956 Cory’s husband Benigno (who 25 years later bragged, “I’ve worked with the CIA on many operations,” quoted in *Intercontinental Press*, 27 January) negotiated the surrender of Huk leader Luis Taruc. The promised land reform never materialized.

The ‘American Century’ in the Philippines

The Philippines’ economy experienced significant expansion in the 1950s. Tariffs were set up to shelter local industry and as a result the import-substituting manufacturing sector doubled between 1948 and 1958 (accounting for 20 percent of net national product). Despite this quantitative expansion, the industrial development of the Philippines remained extremely one-sided. Concentrated in and around Manila, indigenous manufacturing consisted of assembling parts made elsewhere and the production of processed foods and light consumer goods. Shoes were virtually the national product, perhaps explaining why 3,000 pairs of them were found in Imelda Marcos’ dressing room after her flight from the Malacanang Palace. Heavy industry was non-existent.

In the early 1960s the limited measures undertaken to promote industrial development were reversed. At the behest of the IMF and World Bank, the government instituted a radical currency devaluation and slashed tariffs. The resulting increase in the cost of imported raw materials and equipment halved the rate of growth in manufacturing. Working-class living standards plummeted as real wages fell by ten percent in two years. But the devaluation provided what the IMF wanted: a bonanza for agribusiness and easier conditions for foreign capital penetration. In the course of the 1960s imports of machinery and vehicles outpaced traditional exports, as the trade deficit soared to \$257 million in 1969. The national debt approached \$2 billion. The next decade would see it spiral out of control (see *Development Debauchery: The World Bank in the Philippines*; Walden Bello et al, 1982).

A further 60 percent devaluation of the peso ordered by the IMF in 1970 kicked off a debilitating round of inflation. To suppress a rising tide of strikes and social struggle against rapidly falling living standards, Marcos, who had occupied the presidency since 1966, imposed martial law in September 1972. Wages were curtailed, strikes banned, militant unionists blacklisted and political opponents driven underground. All of this was applauded by the IMF and other imperialist financial agencies as the road to prosperity for the Philippines.

Marcos took advantage of martial law to set up several free trade zones. These were supposed to attract foreign investment, create jobs and introduce modern production techniques into the Philippine economy.

But, predictably, the companies attracted by the low-wage tariff-free zones tended to be low-tech, labor-intensive sweat shops (garments and electronics). Moreover they imported most of their components and raw materials, rather than creating local spin-off industries as had been projected. In the first ten years of its operation, Marcos’ showpiece, the Bataan Export Processing Zone, generated a paltry \$82 million in foreign exchange earnings to offset the \$192 million it cost to construct it in the first place.

‘Crony Capitalism’

Marcos’ authoritarian “solutions” for the chronic economic problems of the neo-colony which he ruled proved a spectacular failure. But for a tiny stratum they were extremely lucrative. Friends and relatives of Ferdinand and Imelda cornered markets and exploited the government’s connections with the IMF and World Bank to build private empires. By monopolizing agribusiness, controlling government-initiated construction projects, using state decrees that awarded entire industries to individuals, and scoring spectacular “commission” coups through their ability to secure American multinationals’ favored contracts, the “cronies” amassed immense fortunes.

Few regimes flaunted so brazenly Proudhon’s maxim that “property is theft.” (During Ferdinand’s tenure in office he managed to accumulate a personal fortune of \$10 billion which, on a salary officially pegged at \$4,700 a year, was quite a feat.) Nor did many so openly translate state power into a license to kill. The assassination of Benigno Aquino in 1983 declared to the world that no one was safe from Marcos’ obsessive quest to silence critics. In 1985 alone there were over 2,200 known cases of political executions, torture and “disappearances.”

The recipe for “export-led” growth enforced by the IMF and the World Bank, as well as the pillaging and incompetence of Marcos and his cronies, have made the Philippines into an international “basket case.” The economy was also hit hard by the rapid rise in interest rates in the early 1980s and the simultaneous fall in the price of its chief exports. (Sugar, the leading export, fell from 65 to 3 cents a pound between 1975 and 1985.) Foreign investment fell off dramatically and lines of credit (which had provided Marcos with an “alternative” to economic growth throughout the 1970s) were cut.

Today the national debt stands at \$27.5 billion and the interest payments alone consume a third of the country’s annual export earnings. In the past two years gross national product has contracted by ten percent. Per capita consumption has fallen to 1972 levels. Half of the workforce is unemployed at least part of the year.

The dismal economic situation in these potentially rich islands is only partially attributable to the greed and mismanagement of Marcos and his cronies. It is more fundamentally a product of the mechanism of imperialist exploitation. The 30 January issue of *Far East Economic Review* pointed to some of the ways in which this works, “some multinationals have indeed shortchanged host countries by underpricing exports and overpricing im-

ports to shift profits, and therefore tax liability, outside the host country.” In the case of the Philippines in 1984 “of the total net profits of P7.2 billion [pesos], foreign companies garnered 67%.” Most of this is repatriated by the foreign corporations in addition to the \$1.7 billion taken out of the economy annually in interest payments to international creditors. That is why, whether under Marcos or Aquino, a capitalist Philippines is doomed to *remain* a “basket case.” Only by expropriating the capitalist parasites—domestic and foreign—and repudiating the debt to the international financial bloodsuckers, can the Filipino people escape the endless cycle of exploitation and poverty which membership in the imperialist “free world” condemns them to.

Preconditions for Revolution

Financed by debt, driven by greed and sustained by brutal repression, Marcos and his cronies had brought the Philippines to the brink of a massive social explosion. Writing in 1915, Lenin specified “three major symptoms” of a revolutionary situation:

“(1) when it is impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule without any change; when there is a crisis, in one form or another, among the ‘upper classes’, a crisis in the policy of the ruling class, leading to a fissure through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes burst forth. For a revolution to take place, it is usually insufficient for ‘the lower classes not to want’ to live in the old way; it is also necessary that ‘the upper classes should be unable’ to live in the old way; (2) when the suffering and want of the oppressed classes have grown more acute than usual; (3) when, as a consequence of the above causes, there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses, who uncomplainingly allow themselves to be robbed in ‘peace time’, but, in turbulent times, are drawn both by all the circumstances of the crisis *and by the ‘upper classes’ themselves* into independent historical action.”

—“The Collapse of the Second International”

This describes the situation in the Philippines last winter. The ruling class was deeply fractured. The millions of Filipinos who lived in squalor amid obscene displays of tasteless ostentation from the tiny layer of ersatz Disneyland aristocrats and hangers-on clustered around the Malacanang Palace increasingly looked to the Maoist insurgents in the countryside for deliverance from Marcos.

The malaise extended into the military which, like the rest of the bloated and corrupt state apparatus, was slowly decomposing. Splits in the armed forces had been evident since at least 1977, and the military was becoming decreasingly effective against the NPA insurgency. “Crony-ism” in the armed forces translated into a log-jam at the top as Marcos favorites stayed on long past retirement age, thereby freezing the promotional ladder and creating disaffection among the more junior officers.

Yet even the most favorable objective preconditions are insufficient to ensure the triumph of the proletarian revolution. That requires above all a leadership which possesses the programmatic capacity to turn the objective possibility into an actuality. The Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP—founded in 1968 after splitting from the Moscow-line PKP) has succeeded in

organizing a nationally-coordinated peasant-based guerrilla movement, the NPA. But it has proved utterly incapable of providing even a deformed approximation of revolutionary leadership for the Filipino working class.

The CPP advocates an explicitly non-proletarian “countryside surrounds the cities” strategy of rural guerrilla warfare as the road to socialism. Despite their position of influence in the May First Movement (KMU), the largest and most militant trade-union federation, the armed agrarian reformers of the CPP/NPA view events in the urban metropolitan areas, particularly the struggles of the working class, as secondary to the conflict in the countryside.

Even when peasant-based petty-bourgeois movements succeed in overthrowing neo-colonialist regimes, and go on to expropriate the means of production (as occurred in China, Vietnam and Cuba), the regimes which result are necessarily cast in the mold of the degenerated Soviet Union. The absence of a class-conscious proletariat as an active contender for state power permits the leadership of the peasant insurrectionary armed forces to establish a political monopoly and consolidate its position as a parasitic stratum sitting atop the collectivized property forms.

CPP/NPA: Aquino’s Would-Be Partners

The rapid success of Aquino’s “People Power” revolt came as a big surprise to the CPP/NPA, which had projected a protracted intra-bourgeois conflict during which they could consolidate their island base areas while picking up disillusioned Aquino supporters radicalized by Marcos repression. The CPP sought to become the left wing of a broad anti-Marcos popular-front government (“New Democracy” in Maoist parlance). This strategy has been overtaken by events as Aquino managed to defeat Marcos without the participation of the CPP. Indeed a key part of her program was that she was better able to contain the leftist insurrection.

The flight of Marcos and the triumph of the yellow banner of “People Power” was profoundly disorienting for much of the CPP/NPA rank and file, who had been recruited to a program of anti-Marcos reformism. Aquino moved to exploit the crisis of confidence within the CPP ranks by rapidly making good on her promise to release all CPP/NPA prisoners, despite the opposition of the military. One recently-released political prisoner commented that the 15,000 NPA guerrillas “are getting very tired of living in the hills on sweet potatoes” (*Toronto Globe and Mail*, 6 March), implying that they would not long continue fighting against a popular “People Power” government.

Aquino has been careful to reassure those who considered her olive branch to the NPA as “naive”: “I am offering amnesty to all those who have joined the NPA but who are not out-and-out Communists and who will lay down their arms, renounce all forms of violence and pledge allegiance to the new government. I am confident there are many who belong in this category and, in fact, the hard-core constitute a very small minority....I am not really so naive” (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 February). For

the “hard core” Aquino promises extermination.

The CPP/NPA leadership responded to Aquino’s victory with contradictory signals. The international office of the National Democratic Front (a CPP front group) initially hailed it as “a people’s victory over the US-backed Marcos regime.” Its 26 February assertion that, “In toppling the Marcos regime, the people have cracked the imperialist hold of the US over the Philippines” (cited in *International Viewpoint*, 24 March) shows the profound disorientation of the CPP. In fact Aquino’s victory, by removing the despised Marcos regime, accomplished just the opposite: the beginnings of the *re-consolidation* of the imperialists’ hold—at the NPA’s expense. Yet despite the conciliatory approach taken to Aquino to date, the NPA has not called off its struggle against the army.

The intensity of fighting varies widely—in some districts an informal cease-fire is in effect, while in others the war is waged as fiercely as ever. The *New York Times* (21 April) reported that according to Antonion Zumel, a CPP political bureau member and spokesman for the National Democratic Front, the NPA would continue to attack “military units that it says are abusive, provincial warlords once protected by the Marcos regime and certain paramilitary units said to have a long record of human rights violations.”

CPP’s Inability to Capitalize on the Crisis of the Regime

The CPP’s abstention from the February 7 presidential election was presented as a principled refusal to participate in “a meaningless but noisy electoral contest between local reactionaries.” It is certainly true that nothing fundamental would change as a result of the electoral process. Nonetheless the abstention of the CPP allowed Aquino’s bourgeois coalition to present itself as the sole opposition to Marcos.

Leninists could not, as a matter of principle, have offered any political support to Aquino and the bourgeois opposition. But this does not mean that the alternative was passive abstentionism. A genuine revolutionary party with the kind of mass base which the CPP possesses would have run directly, or through a legal front group, on a socialist program which put forward the independent class interests of the workers and the oppressed. The purpose of such a campaign would not be to get elected but to raise issues that would demonstrate to the working masses how *both* wings of the bourgeoisie were united on all the fundamental questions.

The reason the CPP did not do so is because it viewed Aquino as the embodiment of the “anti-Marcos” wing of the capitalist class that it has long sought alliance with. Despite its occasional denunciations of both sides in the contest, *Ang Bayan* (the CPP’s paper) leaned heavily toward Aquino, claiming that “Corazon Aquino has been carrying on a vigorous antifascist campaign, thus making valuable contributions to the people’s overall antifascist struggles.” The CPP’s imprisoned former head, Jose Maria Sison, suggested that the party’s “minimum boycott” would “allow the opposition candidates

to seek votes from [the CPP’s] mass base, which is sizeable and can be decisive.” Sison also ventured the opinion that, “To me personally, the opposition tandem of Aquino and Laurel is far, far better and more acceptable” (quoted in *Intercontinental Press*, 10 March). Some “boycott”!

In the aftermath of the election, when it was clear that Marcos was preparing to cling to power by naked force and Aquino was talking about massive civil disobedience, there was a fleeting opportunity for the CPP, with its substantial trade-union base, to take advantage of the bourgeoisie’s crisis by aggressively uniting the plebeian masses in a struggle to overthrow the tottering regime. The masses were drawn into political activity as a consequence of the elections and the military was divided. In this situation a wave of factory and land seizures culminating in a national general strike against the hated regime could have opened the road to the conquest of power by the proletariat. A key part of organizing such a general strike movement would have been the initiation of a network of workers councils, with their own armed defense guards, which could have formed the nucleus of proletarian rule.

Instead, Leandro Alejandro, the 25-year-old secretary general of Bayan (a legal reformist coalition which the CPP is active within), went to Camp Crame to negotiate with military chieftain Enrile. Unable to cut a deal, Alejandro announced that the confrontation in the streets was just a “war of the ruling class.” By sitting out the struggle against Marcos, the CPP and its allies handed over the initiative to Aquino and the Catholic hierarchy, and allowed them to claim the fruits of the victory.

Despite the passivity and abstention of the left, the situation remains highly volatile. There are obviously important rifts in the new government over how to manage the transition back to “normalcy” after 14 years of despotism. Enrile and Ramos (the military “conservatives”) want to use the authority of the new government to terminate the leftist insurgency through naked repression; whereas Aquino and the “reformist” wing favor a combination of the carrot and the stick with an initial emphasis on winning “hearts and minds” in NPA base areas with new promises of land reform and an amnesty for those who turn themselves in.

Program for Power

In periods of mass social turmoil in which tens and hundreds of thousands of people are drawn into politics for the first time, a small revolutionary formation can become a decisive factor. But this is only possible if it has a correct program, and the capacity to apply it intelligently. Such a party must also have the political courage to “swim against the stream” and not capitulate to the existing illusions of the masses.

What is required today in the Philippines is a party firmly based on the Transitional Program, the core of which Leon Trotsky explained in 1938 as “a system of *transitional demands*, stemming from today’s conditions and from today’s consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat.”

One of the key demands which a revolutionary party

would put forward at this juncture would be a call for immediate elections to a constituent assembly. This simple challenge to Aquino's right to rule by decree could drive a wedge between Cory and her misled plebeian supporters.

The kind of "democracy" Aquino is committed to was demonstrated by her announcement that she would be appointing a commission to draft a new constitution, in the meantime arrogating all executive and legislative power to herself. Asked why those charged with elaborating a new constitution should be appointed instead of elected, Justice Minister Neptali Gonzalez replied "that popular election 'may not necessarily result in the election of the most qualified person' able to draft 'the best constitution possible'" (*New York Times*, 26 March). So much for "People Power"!

Another key question in the Philippines today is the *national* question. This has two aspects. Firstly, a revolutionary organization must absolutely and unconditionally recognize the right of the oppressed Muslim Moro minority in the southern islands to self-determination. The Moros have periodically fought ferocious armed rebellions for independence from the predominantly Christian Filipino majority. The latest of these wars of national liberation in the 1970s was brutally suppressed by Marcos at the cost of 60,000 lives.

Secondly, there is the question of U.S. imperialist domination of the Philippines itself. As one source notes: "After Reagan was elected, it had become widely respectable in nearly all circles in the Philippines, for the first time since the turn-of-the-century Philippine-American war, to be anti-American in matters of policy...By now most opposition leaders, whether in jail, in exile, underground or enjoying limited freedom of movement, had called for the removal of the American bases."

—*Revolution in the Philippines*, F. Poole and M. Vanzi, 1984

Yet Aquino and her government are pledged to maintain the imperialist garrisons at least until 1991. Laurel's first official utterance as foreign minister was to announce Subic Bay and Clark Field were safe because "the Philippines was not anti-American."

This has created problems for Aquino as the massive U.S. military presence is extremely unpopular with ordinary Filipinos. As Jose Diokno, chairman of Aquino's own Human Rights Committee put it, "The Philippines is an independent country that is not sovereign." Diokno reflected the bitterness of many of his countrymen when he denounced the March 21 stabbing of a Filipino by an off-duty U.S. serviceman as "one in a long string of abuses committed by American servicemen against Filipinos...in all cases, the servicemen involved never faced Philippine courts" (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 24 April). The demand for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of all imperialist military forces is a powerful lever to break the allegiance of Aquino's mass base.

The land question is also pivotal to any revolutionary strategy in this country where two-thirds of the population is rural. The NPA's peasant-based revolt has been fueled by the failure of Marcos and his predecessors to effect any substantial land reform, despite repeated promises to do so. By the end of 1980 a mere 1,700 tenants

had benefited from the much-heralded "emancipation patents." Behind this kulakization at a snail's pace lies the intractable opposition of the large landowners, as well as the huge agribusiness monopolies, to any significant redistribution. As the World Bank loan officer for the Philippines commented, "Land reform is not amenable to halfway measures." And yet halfway measures were all that Marcos, his cronies, the World Bank and foreign capital could countenance. Aquino, who comes from one of the largest landowning families in the Philippines, will do no better.

"the 2,300 workers employed by the 'People's President,' who has pledged to address the urgent need for land reform in the still largely feudal and impoverished Philippine countryside, do not own one inch of land...Ardl, a 25-year-old labourer, heaved his machete after cutting cane, and leant against a rickety hut of palm and bamboo. His family had worked on the hacienda for 60 years, he told me, and 'we want land'."

—[London] *Observer*, 2 March

He won't get any from Cory's powerful Cojuangco clan. A revolutionary party must rally the peasantry behind the working class by calling for the expropriation of the landlords and nationalization of large-scale agribusiness.

Revolutionists would also raise the demand for the right of the trade unions to "open the books" of the big capitalists and to proceed with the expropriation without compensation under workers control of all the holdings of Marcos and those (like Enrile) who profited from the wholesale looting of the economy over the past 15 years. Furthermore it is necessary to mobilize the masses to root out the torturers and criminals (like Ramos) among the cops, the officer corps and the government bureaucracy, and subject them to trial by democratically-elected people's courts. But Aquino is administering Marcos' state apparatus on behalf of the entire bourgeoisie, including the "cronies." She has no intention of carrying out such measures; like other purely democratic demands, they can only be carried out by mobilizing the power of the proletariat *against* the new government.

In response to capitalist "austerity" schemes to meet the demands of the international loan sharks, revolutionists should demand a tripling of the minimum wage and a sliding scale of wages and hours to combat unemployment. The workers must respond to capitalist pleas of inability to pay by the expropriation of industry along with the banks and the agribusiness monopolies. In order to defend the unions against attacks by rightist thugs, scabs and the armed forces, it is necessary to begin to organize armed self-defense squads in every workplace to form the basis of a workers militia. Such a program of democratic and transitional demands leads logically to a call for a workers government—based on democratically-elected workers councils—to expropriate the entire capitalist class and destroy the bourgeois state.

The Crisis of Leadership in the Filipino Proletariat

The Filipino working class is one of the most viciously exploited proletariats in the world. Effective labor costs

are less than half of those of Singapore and Taiwan and only a third of Hong Kong. Despite the Marcos regime's heavy repression, workers have managed to organize powerful unions and have waged strikes with desperate courage. Between 1982 and 1984 the Bataan Export Processing Zone, "a zone which the government boasted would never have a strike had been hit by three general strikes in three years, each involving up to 20,000 workers" (*International Labour Reports*, July/August 1985). The victory of "People Power" unleashed a wave of strikes, including a 10-day shutdown of the two giant U.S. military bases. "At least for now," commented *Business Week* (24 February), "the increasing radicalization of the work force is a more pressing concern than the communist insurgency."

Over and over the Filipino working class has proven its combativity. What is missing is a leadership committed to a resolute struggle for working-class power. The CPP's program of a "New Democratic" first stage in which the workers and peasants unite with the "progressive" and "anti-imperialist" sectors of the capitalist class is a fetter on the heroic and combative Filipino proletariat. In the neo-colonial "third world," as in the industrialized imperialist "first world," *all* sectors of the bourgeoisie are united by their common class interests against the workers and peasants. Alliances with one or another section of the capitalist class can only demoralize and politically disarm the workers and thus lead to the victory of the counterrevolution.

The evident appetite of a large section of the CPP leadership to seek accommodation with Aquino paves the way for a bloody massacre on the model of the liquidation of the Indonesian Communist Party in 1965, in which some 200,000 workers and peasants perished. While militarily defending the CPP/NPA cadres against Aquino/Enrile's "reformed" military, it is the duty of revolutionary Marxists to wage a ruthless political struggle against the fatal class-collaborationist illusions being promoted by Sison & Co.

The history of the Philippines in this century amply demonstrates that the fundamental tasks of the national-democratic revolution can *only* be accomplished under the rule of the working class. The Menshevik/Stalinist program of "two-stage" revolution is designed to weld the workers and peasants to the ruling elite, pending the "completion" of the classical tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Yet the interpenetration of urban and rural ruling classes in Filipino society, as well as the subordination of the domestic bourgeoisie to the American colossus, makes the national bourgeoisie incapable of playing any historically progressive "anti-imperialist" role. Only the Leninist-Trotskyist program of permanent revolution—the expropriation of the capitalists and landed oligarchs, and the establishment of a workers and peasants government—can break the chains of imperialist debt slavery and capitalist exploitation which shackle the dispossessed millions of the Philippines today. ■