

Philippine Communism at its Height: The Marcos and Aquino Eras

By

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Communism is not a new phenomenon in the Philippines. The Partido Komunistang Pilipinas (PKP) was founded in November 1930 by Crisanto Evengalista. In 1938 it merged with the Socialist party. From the time of the merger until the 1967 split that led to the founding of the Communist party of the Philippines (CPP), the PKP can be regarded as the only radical party of the Philippines. During the Japanese Occupation of the Philippines, the military branch of the PKP, the Peoples Army against Japan (Hukbong Bayan Laban sa Hapon) or the Huks¹ created a large resistance movement. During the post-war era the PKP and the Huks had much greater strength with legal status and greatly enlarged membership. Social and economic grievances brought about several peasant unions to PKP's membership, one of which was the Pambansang Kaisahan ng Magbubukid (PKM) with local branches in almost every town and barrio in central and southern Luzon.

In 1946, the PKP led political party, the Democratic Alliance won 6 congressional seats. The Democratic Alliance candidates and the Central Luzon

1. For a further study on the Huks and the Huk Rebellion see, Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion, A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines*, Quezon City, 1979.

farmers they represented were the targets of a campaign by local landlords to roll back the wartime agrarian policies implemented by the Huks. While many landlords were spending the war years abroad or in Manila under Japanese occupation, many of their tenants took over the abandoned land and took up arms to defend it. Jose Lava, secretary of the organisation for the PKP advocated armed struggle to resist efforts by the landlords and their armed guards to impose the status quo ante. The peasants who comprised the overwhelming majority of the wartime Huk movement were well organised, well-armed and experienced in battle. The new government was weak and discredited by charges of collaboration. Several members of the central committee favoured parliamentary struggle, that is working for congressional representation through legal means. By the time the Central Committee met to resolve this issue, many peasants and PKP members had already taken their weapons and gone underground to begin fighting. The party had no choice but to sanction the armed struggle policy.

In 1946, the wartime Huk organisation was reorganised as the National Liberation Army (Hukbong Mapagpalava ng Bayan - HMB). All party resources were concentrated on party struggle which scored many early successes. By 1950 Lava declared that a revolutionary situation existed and that the party should plan for an early seizure of power. As part of the plan, the small, mobile guerrilla squads of the HMB were reorganised into larger units capable of meeting government troops in positional warfare, but the government counteracted. Soon Lava and several other politburo members were arrested in Manila. Several HMB main units were subsequently decimated by the Philippine military while others were demoralized. Social reforms and economic development aid further undercut the communists' appeal.

By 1954, the HMB had suffered defeat and a substantial loss of popular support. Jesus Lava who had succeeded his brother as PKP's general-secretary acknowledged the futility of the plan for an early seizure of power and proclaimed a shift to parliamentary struggle. However, by that time, there were very few party members left for open, legal activities. But the shift to parliamentary struggle was blocked by the Anti-Subversion Law which declared the communists and its affiliates illegal and imposed stiff penalties on party members. Many PKP and HMB members were encouraged to surrender in exchange for a government promise not to prosecute them for involvement but

to return to civilian life. As a result, party organs ceased to function and by the 1960's the PKP was largely inactive except for a few renegade units which had degenerated into criminal bands practicing extortion and banditry, mostly in the hills of central Luzon.

This paper focuses on the communist parties during the Marcos and Aquino eras. The parties advocated armed struggle or other revolutionary means to challenge or overthrow the existing state authority in the Philippines. During the Marcos regime, the rise of several Marxist-Leninist groups emerged and the PKP took a transformation in outlook and influence. The party became pro-Soviet and a Maoist communist party emerged and became the dominant group, as seen in the structure and operations of its military branch, the New People's Army (NPA) and of its political coalition, the National Democratic Front (NDF).

With the sudden collapse of Ferdinand Marcos and the emergence of popular President Corazon Aquino, the communist parties have undergone drastic changes. Aquino's policy of conducting peace negotiations with the insurgents and restoring electoral and parliamentary institutions put the CPP on the defensive and reduced its ability to mobilize popular support against the government. The CPP has experienced a series of political setbacks. During the Aquino era, the CPP experienced only fundamental weaknesses which threatened the strength of the CPP/NPA. These issues are also examined.

The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP)

On December 24, 1968 the CPP was formally established by young revolutionaries gathered in a barrio in Pangasinan with Jose Maria Sison as its founding chairman. The new party differentiated itself from the PKP by adding the phrase "Marxist-Leninist" or "Mao Tse-tung thought" in parentheses.² Sison's strategy was to wage a people's war in the countryside and aimed at implementing Mao's principle of "encircling the cities from the countryside". The CPP advocated armed struggle and criticized the PKP leadership for concentrating its efforts in Manila and the surrounding areas of Central and Southern

2. Franciso Nemenzo, "Divergence and Consensus: Trends in Philippine Communism", Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1982, p. 9.

Luzon: ignoring the rural mass base and exposing HMB forces to nearby government troops.³ Its motto was "Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party", and it marked a dividing line between two traditions in Philippine Communism.⁴ It explained the failures of the Huk rebellion, questioned the legitimacy of the PKP and provided action for a new generation of revolutionaries.

The new generation soon put their revolutionary zeal into practice. On January 26, 1970, demonstrations were staged in Manila to protest what they viewed as broken campaign promises of the recently re-elected President Marcos. They had stormed into Malacanan Palace and it was a show of exuberant leftism in which the guerrilla mystique was reflected in acts of increasingly violent protest against the government.⁵ It was followed by jeepney strikes, the Diliman commune at the University of the Philippines and several other demonstration. Several were injured and hundreds were arrested.

In response to such disturbances, President Marcos declared martial law in 1972. Thereafter, several party members of the CPP went underground. The writ of habeas corpus was also suspended. The CPP began to organise protest actions by urging people to wear black ribbons to symbolise the "death of democracy". More militant protest actions erupted over government issues such as a wage freeze and strike ban in the midst of inflation, the construction of energy projects in places sacred to the mountain tribes, slum clearance programs and the luxury hotel projects. In 1969, however, the surge of communist guerrilla operations increased, when the CPP succeeded in mobilising an indigenous insurgency with the birth of the New People's Army.⁶

The New People's Army (NPA)

In 1968 when the CPP was established, they advocated a peasant based revolutionary strategy but had no peasant base. Being students and professionals

3. Amado Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution*, Hong Kong, 1971 (mimeo).

4. CPP, "Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party", 1968 (mimeo).

5. Tilman Durdin, "Philippine Communism", *Problems of Communism*, May-June 1976, pp. 28-9.

6. Francisco Nemenzo, "Divergence and Consensus", p. 25.

drawn from the ranks of the urban intelligentsia, they had no practice in guerrilla war. But their problem was solved when Commander Dante, a HMB cadre and former Huk leader seceded with a few dozen troops from a faction of the old Huk army that had degenerated into a criminal syndicate and affiliated himself with the CPP and established the NPA on March 29, 1969.⁷

The objectives of the NPA are to engage in party building; to carry out agrarian revolution; build rural bases and advance the armed struggle and to help construct the national united front.⁸ The NPA became a fighting force and NPA recruits were initially organised into local militias, military bands and regular mobile forces. Young activists from urban areas gained acceptance from local villagers by helping to introduce simple irrigation facilities, crop rotation methods, public health techniques and other useful services. The NPA units are viewed by villagers not only as soldiers but also as social workers, agricultural advisers, paramedics and teachers who were "more effective than the police in clearing up carabao thieves, usurers, abusive overseers and other hated elements." The NPA was clearly inspired by the Maoist model of a Peoples' Liberation Army.⁹

The NPA initially attempted to establish base areas in the remote provinces of Isabela and Quezon. The revolutionary struggle was carried out strategically. The party strove to create guerrilla fronts in a few major islands first, then the other islands later. Each guerrilla front would be self sufficient. The best cadres were often sent to the regional committees and guerrilla fronts rather than concentrate at party headquarters. They were given a great measure of autonomy and urged to rely on their own initiative in applying party policy to local circumstances. This strategy was advantageous, since the party would exercise a high degree of flexibility. But government forces captured the top leadership, including Sison between 1976-7. Soon the number of NPA clashes with government forces declined; then government troops were reassigned to Southern Philippines to fight the Muslim secessionists led by the MNLF. This gave the NPA several years of valuable time to pursue clandestine work and political activity as well as establish local guerrilla fronts and develop strong and reliable local supports.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 26

8. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

9. Rodney Tasker, "Elusive Law & Order", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 5, 1984, pp. 12-14.

By 1980 the NPA claimed to have 26 guerrilla fronts scattered among the islands of Luzon, the Visayas and the Christian provinces of Mindanao. Of these 13 were considered large, covering 12 to 23 municipalities; 6 were medium-sized, covering 8-11 municipalities and 7 were small covering 5 to 7 municipalities. By the end of 1983 party membership had increased three fold from 10,000 to 30,000 and the number of NPA soldiers, full or partime had expanded from 8,000 to 20,000.¹⁰ Due to this increase in CPP members, the NPA was able to expand into new territories. The number of guerrilla fronts increased to 45 and established influence in Southern and Central Luzon and in parts of the southern island of Mindanao where previously only Muslim insurgents had been active.

Sparrow units were formed and were successful in killing government officials. In November 1983, 31 such killings were reported in Davao.¹¹ In addition to hit and run ambushes and raids, there have been NPA attacks on fixed government installations and short-term takeovers and occupations of municipalities in areas where the guerrillas have strong local support. Large-scale ambushes involving company-sized units, have also become more common. On September 29, 1983, 70 NPA guerrillas ambushed and killed 39 soldiers and 7 civilians riding in an armored weapons carrier on patrol northwest of Zamboanga in Mindanao.¹² This was the highest death toll suffered by government forces since NPA operations began in 1969.

In 1984 there were several reports of NPA efforts to disrupt the May parliamentary elections. In Samar, for example, 427 ballot boxes were snatched by the NPA on election day.¹³ Around the country, more than 60 government troops were killed by the NPA on that day alone. Marcos reports that the communist guerrillas were responsible for the deaths of 4,922 Philippine soldiers and civilians in the three years ending in August 1984, including the assassination of Senator Benigno Aquino.

10. Guy Sacerdoti, "Red Army on the March", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 5, 1984, pp. 40-41.

11. Robert Trumbull, "Filipino Communist Rebels Press Attacks on Army & Corruption", *The New York Times*, November 30, 1983

12. Belinda Aquino, "NPA wipes out 39 soldiers", *Ang Katipunan*, November 1983, p. 4.

13. Guy Sacerdoti, "Red Army on the March", p. 41

The Philippine government responded by increasing its forces and by mid-1984, the government was claiming some successes in its struggle against the NPA. Despite the increase in government forces and anti NPA combat battalions and the transfer of military units from MNLF areas to NPA areas, communist guerrillas remained active.

Despite efforts from the government to effectively deal with the communist resurgence, NPA units have been very careful to avoid getting caught. They remain in the countryside in areas where they are sure of local support. They maintain high mobility with small, highly self-sufficient units, avoiding direct confrontations with government troops in positional combat. The NPA has been popular because people like the communist ideology and they are the only opposition really.¹⁴ The success of the NPA is also dependent on its mobilization of a mass opposition throughout the country and this task is organised by the political coalition of the CPP, the National Democratic Front.

The National Democratic Front (NDF)

The large majority of both CPP and NPA cadres do not fight on the active guerrilla fronts. Most work in rural barrios and poor urban communities, in factories and on plantations, in churches, hospitals, schools and even government offices. Their efforts to isolate enemy diehards politically and to combat imperialists, feudalists and bureaucratic capitalists are coordinated by the NDF. In areas where guerrilla fronts have been well established, notably Isabela and Cagayan in Northeastern Luzon, the NDF functions as a defacto government. It collects taxes, implements land reform programs, organises public works and schools and administers "revolutionary justice".¹⁵ In urban areas the NDF provided a focus for opposition to the Marcos government. Even before the Aquino assassination, the NDF was able to mobilise thousands of Filipinos for strikes and demonstrations.

14. E.S. Browning, "Communist NPA Slowly Gains Influence in Philippines", *Asian Wall Street Journal*, July 4, 1983.

15. For more details see Joel Rocamora, "Turning Point: The NDF Takes the Lead", *Southeast Asia Chronicle*, April 1982.

The NDF was established by the CPP on April 24, 1973 when a Preparatory Commission for the National Democratic Front announced a 10 point programme. The constituent organisations of the NDF include May First Movement (KMU), Christians for National Liberation (CNL), Nationalist Youth (KM), League of Filipino Students (LFS), Youth for Nationalism and Democracy, Nationalist Health Association (MASAPA) and Association of National Teachers (KAGUMA).¹⁶

Among its potential allies, the NDF supports the Muslim groups in the Southern Philippines fighting for secession or greater autonomy. Another ally is the radical Catholic community. This group was largely influenced by the Philippine clergy who held radical views. The radicalization of the Christian social reform movement followed several routes. There were mass meetings, organising campaigns and political actions aimed at giving the Church a more active role in practicing liberation theology. Several radical Christian groups were formed by 1972, namely Christians for National Liberation (CNL) with Fr. Edicio de la Torre as its Chairman, the Nagkakaisang Partido Demokratiko-Sosyalista ng Pilipinas (The United Democratic Socialist Party of the Philippines or Soc. -Dem.) with its military organizations, the Sandigan.¹⁷

As increasing number of groups became alienated from the Marcos government, the NDF revised its 10 point programme. The purpose was to establish a broader organisational framework to intergrate more diverse opposition groups: the unifying themes were resistance to the Marcos government and to its American coalition. These sentiments were manifested in the form of boycott movements to protest the presidential elections of June 1982. In February 1981, the NPA and a coalition of other groups formed the People's Opposition to the Plebiscite Election (PEOPLE)¹⁸. They soon joined forces with the United Democratic Opposition (UNIDO). The new grouping which called itself the Peoples Movement for Nationalism and Democracy (Peoples Mind) advocated a boycott of the presidential election, elimination of U.S. military bases and implementation of tighter controls on multinational corporations.

16. For more details, see *Southeast Asia Chronicle*, April 1982.

17. David Rosenberg, "Communism in the Philippines", September October 1984, p. 44.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 45

The boycott succeeded in reducing voter turnout. The important element was that the NDF was able to work with other anti-Marcos elements. The 1981 election boycott showed that the NDF could mobilize thousands of rural Filipinos. The NDF also helped organise the boycott campaign against the National Assembly elections in May 1984. Several prominent Filipino politicians joined the NDF boycott, including Agapito Aquino, younger brother of the slain opposition leader, Lorenzo Tanada of the Nationalist Alliance for Justice, Freedom and Democracy and the late Senator Jose Diokno of the old Nationalista Party, who became head of Kaakbay.

The NDF took advantage of the popular disenchantment with the Marcos government. It began a national membership campaign to capitalise on popular discontent and build stronger ties with other anti-Marcos groups. It claims to have over 50,000 full-time organisers at work in two-thirds of the country's provinces. It also claims membership in constituent mass organisations of 1 million Filipinos with a mass base of popular support among 10 million Filipinos.

The NDF appears strongest in the remote areas of the country and still wages armed struggle.

The Aquino Era

The sudden collapse of the regime of Ferdinand Marcos and the non-violent transfer of power to Pres. Corazon Aquino in Feb. 1986 halted temporarily the growth of the armed insurgency launched by the CPP in the early 1970's. Aquino's policy of conducting peace negotiations with the insurgents and restoring electoral and parliamentary institutions put the CPP on the defensive with regard to its strategy of "protracted peoples' war",¹⁹ and reduced its ability to mobilise popular support against the government.

By 1980 the people's war was considered by party leaders to have entered the advanced substage of the strategic defensive in which it would be capable of carrying out limited coordinated tactical offensives. In 1981 CPP leaders began

19. Gareth Porter, "Philippine Communism After Marcos", *Problems of Communism*, September-October 1987, p. 14.

a 3 years program to transform the NPA from a network of small armed propaganda units into regular guerrilla units whose primary tasks were military rather than political. Between 1982 and 1984 NPA armed strength increased from 2,391 to 8,383 guerillas.²⁰ The NPA concentrated on creating company - sized units usually with 60 to 100 fighters. During the 1984-1986 the NPA carried out ambushes of small military or para military units, assassination of individual officials and raids on town halls or military detachments to seize arms.²¹

Despite its increased manpower and military capabilities, the NPA remains far from achieving military parity with the AFP. It cannot hold a town or any other military objective for more than a few hours and must immediately break up into small units after completing an operation. The military growth of the NPA is constrained by the difficulty of obtaining arms. In 1984 it was estimated that 20,000 NPA guerrillas shared only 10,000 rifles. From late 1985 to late 1986 the number of firearms in NPA hands increased from 11,000 to 12,288.²² Up to now, the NPA has not been able to obtain any large number of arms from abroad and what few shipments it has received are believed to have been purchased on the international arms market or from criminal syndicates.

Thus far the peasant associations have been the backbone of political support for the NPA. In 1986 the CPP/NPA had established mass organisations in 7,631 (18%) of the nation's 41,615 rural barangays.²³ The CPP/NPA leadership has claimed that its organised mass base consists of 1 million people who are members of mass organisations associated with the party's underground political front, the NDF. The CPP leadership also recognises that President Aquino's popularity and the restoration of democratic institutions has created some ambivalence on the part of less committed supporters about the desirability of a continued armed struggle. Selective assassinations of civilian officials and police

20. Larry Nicksch, "Insurgency and counterinsurgency in the Philippine", Washington, July 1, 1985, p. 38.

21. Statement by AFP Chief of Staff, General Fidel Ramos, *Manila Bulletin*, October 15, 1987.

22. Brigadier General Alexander Aquirre of the AFP, *Ang Pahayangan Malaya*, Quezon City, June 16, 1987.

23. "The National Security Situation", AFP briefing paper for Philippine Government Officials, July 2, 1986.

military personnel by NPA sparrow units have been used to weaken the government's control and increase popular support for the NPA.

Since 1983, the NDF and its organisations have resorted to strikes as a strategy. The KMU agreed to a 6 month moratorium on strikes as "a gesture of our principled support for and cooperation with the Aquino government",²⁴ but it ended the moratorium when the CPP broke with Aquino in December 1986. Again when chairman Rolando Olalia was murdered in November 1986, the KMU called for a 4 day general strike, but called off the action after only 2 days when it failed to paralyse Metro Manila.²⁵ In October 1987, the KMU failed in its efforts to organise a week-long general strike in Manila over its demand for a 10 peso increase in the daily minimum wage.

By 1986, the CPP began to make adjustments in its strategy. It stepped from the all-out pursuit of military parity to consolidate its political position with the objective of convincing the barrio population that armed struggle was necessary. Until 1986 the CPP's main aim was that the party would win power directly through a military victory. CPP leaders had dismissed electoral struggle as a means of ousting the Marcos regime. The CPP also joined with independent leftist opposition forces in boycotting the 1984 national assembly election, but 85% of the registered voters went to the polls to elect opposition candidates. When in November 1985, Marcos called for a snap presidential election and the opposition united behind the candidacy of Aquino, the CPP's decision to boycott was almost automatic. By summer 1986 the CPP was debating on 3 major issues - the roles and relative importance of armed struggle and political struggle in the revolutionary strategy, the nature of the Aquino government and the nature of the united front.

Aquino's popularity and her offer to negotiate with the insurgent leadership on a ceasefire and political settlement, combined with pressure from within the party, resulted in significant adjustments in CPP policies. The first major policy change after Aquino's inauguration was to try for a tactical alliance with

24. *Manila Chronicle*, December 22, 1986.

25. *The New Philippines Daily Express*, Manila September 30, 1986.

the progressive wing of the Aquino government against its fascist opponent. The second shift was to reduce the level of NPA tactical offensives to be more selective in choosing targets. The NPA was ordered not to attack AFP units unless the latter were engaged in offensive actions. The most important readjustment in CPP strategy, however, was its willingness to begin negotiations with Aquino on a peace agreement. The rationale for the decision was based on the fear of being politically isolated. Secondly, the negotiations would offer the CPP both an opportunity to achieve formal recognition of the national stature and role of the party in the revolutionary movement and a platform to educate the population on the need for armed revolution in the present situation".²⁶ Thirdly, negotiations would test the extent, limit or capacity of the new government's resormism.

As the CPP entered into negotiations with the Aquino government in August 1986, it was ready for a wide range of possibilities, including limited temporary accords on humanitarian issues, depending on how the government's posture evolved. Despite doubts and scepticism, the CPP agreed to a 60 day ceasefire beginning on December 9, 1986 that would permit the 2 sides to engage in substantive political negotiations. Before the ceasefire had expired however, the CPP leadership had decided to reverse its course and resume armed struggle. Three reasons brought about the decision:-

1. The party's assessment of the Aquino government grew markedly more negative during the December-January period.
2. The CPP also viewed Aquino as having moved to the right as early as the end of the summer of 1987 because of her appointments to the Constitutional Commission, her policies toward economic recovery especially her land reform policies and the lack of change in the military. By January 1987, the CPP leaders clearly viewed the government as having moved even further to the right.
3. The liberal wing of the government which had figured prominently in the party's earlier assessments had been weakened because Aquino had replaced the left leaning Labour Minister Augusto Sanchez and local government Minister Aquilino Pimental with more conservative figure. Moreover the plebiscite on the draft constitution scheduled for February 1987 imposed a deadline on the CPP to adopt a clear position on Aquino.

26. Gareth Porter, *The Politics of Counterinsurgency*, pp. 116-8.

In December 1986, the CPP decided to campaign against ratification of the constitution because of its anti-people and anti-nationalist provisions.

On December 22, 1986 the KMU at the 3rd National Congress voted for rejection of the charter on the grounds that it failed to define workers rights or protect the economy against foreign domination. The CPP decided to go against the Aquino government and to seek to prevent it from consolidating power through a big victory in the constitutional plebiscite. The CPP leaders were also worried that extending the ceasefire and negotiations would weaken both the will and capability of the revolutionary movement to carry out the strategy of 'people's war'.

By mid January 1987, NDF negotiators were ordered to disengage in negotiations and to step up mass movement protests against the government's policies. On January 22, the NDF and government delegations jointly announced the indefinite suspension of political tasks. Soon some 30,000 members of the KMP staged a march on Malacanang palace during which 15 demonstrators were killed and 90 others were injured when government security personnel fired into the crowd.²⁷ The Mendiola incident was the culmination of a series of demonstrations by the KMP demanding land reform and by implication attacking the draft constitution as insufficient.

The return to armed struggle was completed on February 7, 1987 when NDF negotiators announced that the insurgents would not renew the ceasefire upon its February 8th expiration. The NDF panel demanded among other pre-conditions for a return to negotiations, that Aquino thoroughly reform and reorient the AFP and recognise that the NDF programme has the support of a considerable section of the population.

The CPP/NPA was quite divided when it came to voting the constitutional referendum. The KMU and KMP in December 1986 voted to defeat the new draft constitution. The CPP/NPA leadership in the regions of Mindanao and Negros openly defied the central leadership and adopted the position of critical ratification. 77% vote in favour of the constitution of February 2, 1987 was a

²⁷ *Asiaweek*, February 1, 1987, p. 22

setback for the CPP.²⁸ There was a growing desire among the population for peace. While CPP leaders in the North, Southeastern and Southeast Mindanao, were planning on armed struggle, party leaders declared publicly that the people in the respective regions wanted the ceasefire extended. Bernabe Buscayno, a former NPA commander released by Aquino in March 1986 warned that the people wanted peace and wanted to give Cory and democracy a chance.²⁹ He was critical of the NPA's use of urban assassination. With the resumption of armed struggle, they demanded a return to ideological unity and discipline within the party.

Conclusion

During the Marcos era the CPP/NPA and its several organisations began to intensify their efforts to work against the government, a deteriorating economy, corruption and the imposition of martial law by armed struggle. The assassination of Benigno Aquino served as an instrument for the CPP/NPA to garner mass support from the peasantry and urban workers. With the overthrow of Marcos, the CPP hoped to consolidate its position and work with the Aquino government. Aquino's land reform policies and the constant rift in her cabinet cast doubts to CPP leaders of Aquino's efficiency to handle the problems. Although a ceasefire was agreed upon, the failure of several of Aquino's measures to intensify economic recovery brought about a breakdown in political negotiations in February 1987. This had called for the Aquino government and the CPP to a more intense military conflict. Aquino, after having tried a policy of negotiations during her first year in office had accepted most of the recommendations of the Philippine military for coping with the insurgency. She had increased the salary and budget of the military from 24 % to 47%. The National Manoeuvre Force became stronger with an additional 2,3000 men. She also increased 6,000 army recruits to the current standing force of 160,000. Three thousand soldiers were assigned for active combat and further disbanded the Regional Unified Commands. Aquino also requested for military assistance from abroad and gave up investigations of human rights abuses by the Philippine military. The government had pinned its hopes for success against the insur-

28. *Manila Chronicle*, February 9, 1987.

29. *Ang Katipunan*, June 1987, pp. 7-8.

gents on a combination of military pressure, economic growth and some form of extensive land reform.

The CPP/NPA was attempting to speed up the pace of the armed struggle. The escalation of violence was not likely to bring any clear advantage to either the government or the insurgents. The CPP/NPA armed insurgency is a strong political military movement that does not appear vulnerable, but it may have difficulty expanding its political base. Its primary support is among the poor peasants and agricultural workers whose livelihood has been improved by the reorganisation of the communities under NPA auspices. They formed shadow governments called Barrio Revolutionary Commands. Many guerrilla agrarian reforms were undertaken such as 200 landlords who were forced to cooperate with the peasants by reducing rents on the lands and increasing the wages of the peasants. If the landlords did not succumb to the demands, their lands would be either abandoned or they would be killed.

The NPA has, therefore, won sympathies from the masses. It has projected a Robin Hood image as its initials NPA has been interpreted as Nice People Around. Even the church has supported the NPA's activities. For example, prior to Aquino's ascension to the presidency, more than 100 priests had joined the guerrillas. Even some bishops had organised the National Section for Social Actions (NASAA) and funds derived were diverted to arm the NPA.

However, rising demands by poor peasants could push middle peasants and landowners to abandon NPA zones. Its ability to win the sympathies of a considerable segment of the intelligentsia had been one of the CPP's strengths during its period of rapid possibility and disintegration of a segment of its rural support base. A political-military accommodation was sought by both the Aquino government and the CPP in order to prevent an inconclusive war. Aquino's grant of amnesty and the release of CPP leaders including Jose Maria Sison indicated that accommodation would ultimately weaken the base of the CPP.