

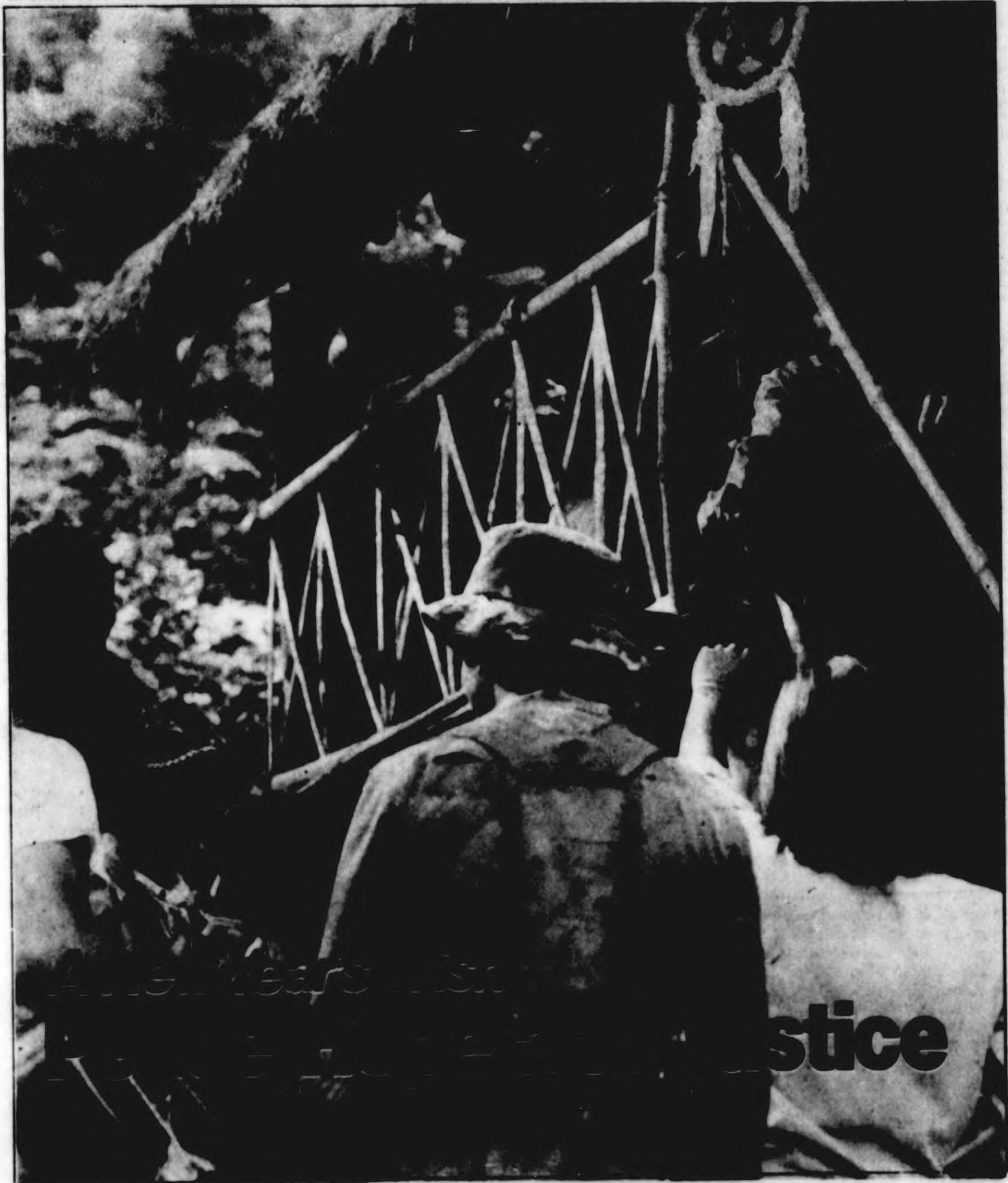
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Justice



Challenges in the New Year

The start of the New Year kicks off with big challenges and tasks for the national democratic movement. As it coincides with the ceasefire period and the peace negotiations, it particularly challenges national democratic forces to maximize every opportunity to heighten the people's understanding and acceptance of the NDF program and of the NDF organization itself.

In this light, we then call on all national democrats and supporters to highlight the following main and interrelated stresses for the overall peace campaign. Accentuating these stresses becomes more urgent today as the peace talks between the government and NDF panels enter the substantive phase.

► The *first stress* should be on the NDF program as a framework for solving the basic problems of the Filipino people. We must go beyond exposing and opposing (i.e. analysis of problems and refutation of solutions) to *proposing* (i.e. explaining the desirability and feasibility of the NDF alternative program).

► The *second stress* is the projection of the NDF as a legitimate political force, with wide popular support and as the biggest federation of revolutionary organizations, and as an indispensable part of any coalition of forces that seeks to solve the current armed and political conflict.

► The *third stress* is on emphasizing the legitimate roots of armed struggle, especially agrarian revolution as the main social agenda. Closely related to this is the projection of the NPA as an army of the people and asserting the need for such a pro-people and nationalist army in any truly representative coalition government.

National democratic underground mass organizations play a key role in carrying forward these main stresses. Even as they give specific focus on their sectors and sectoral issues, their propaganda work should also encompass over-all issues and all sectors. And even as they elaborate the NDF program for their specific sectors, they should moreover continuously project the broad multi-sectoral character of the NDF and widely propagate the NDF program.

And just as the NDF's member-organizations should directly participate in the peace efforts, they should as well seek to actively include the entire people in the peace talks. Peace, after all, is the concern of everyone and should not be confined solely to the NDF-GRP negotiating table. The peace talks should be transformed into a nationwide dialogue focusing on the Filipino people's basic problems and their proposed solutions.

In all, these are the challenges and tasks that immediately confront the national democratic movement. Let us greet these new challenges with renewed courage, stronger unity and greater creativity as we begin the New Year!

SPARKS

Newsbriefs about people's struggles

REGIONAL TRUCE FORGED IN SOUTHERN TAGALOG

For the first time in the 17-year history of the people's struggle in Southern Tagalog, representatives of the NDF in the region met and shook hands with officials of the Regional Unified Command 4 of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. After a two-hour closed-door dialogue at the Bishop's Palace in Lucena City last Dec. 15, RUC 4 chief Gen. Orlando Antonio and NDF-ST's Gregorio Rosal (Ka Roger) signed a joint statement agreeing to abide by the Memorandum of Agreement on Preliminary Ceasefire and the implementing guidelines to be formulated by the National Ceasefire Committee. Witnesses during the talks were Lucena OIC Mayor Ed Abcede and Bishop Ruben Profugo.

Meanwhile, the NPA-ST Regional Operational Command said in a statement that it would endorse the peace talks and promise to abide by the ceasefire agreement. At the same time, it scored the continuing search-and-destroy operations of the AFP in Bondoc Peninsula and the dispersal of rallyists celebrating the ceasefire last Dec. 10 in Lucena City.

WE SUPPORT PEACE EFFORTS - NDF-CL

The National Democratic Front in Central Luzon expressed its full support for the efforts of the NDF negotiating panel to solve the fundamental problems of the country. In a statement issued during a press conference in Pampanga last Dec. 16, the NDF-CL said the ongoing peace negotiations between the revolutionary movement and the Aquino government should lead to a comprehensive political settlement that will pave the way towards genuine national democracy. Said the NDF-CL: "*Sa pansamantalang pagtigil namin sa armadong paglaban sa panahon ng tigil-putukan at pakikipagnegosasyon, naipakita namin ang marubdob na hangad na makahanap ng mas mapayapang paraan sa pagbibigay-solusyon sa mga suliranin ng mamamayan. Nasa gubyernong Aquino na ngayon ang bahagi sa pagpapatupad ng mga hakbang tungo sa tunay na paglutas ng suliranin ng bayan.*"

CPDF PRESENTS DEMANDS IN PRESS CON

The Cordillera People's Democratic Front presented six issues it wants to raise during the substantive phase of the peace negotiations between the Aquino government and the NDF. In a press conference held Dec. 14 in Benguet, the CPDF said it will push for the 1) recognition of the right of the Cordillera people to self-determination; 2) recognition of their right to struggle in self-defense of their ancestral lands; 3) recognition of their right to struggle for genuine land reform; 4) maintenance of existing indigenous socio-political structures, respect for customs or tribal laws and enhancement of indigenous culture; 5) recognition of the right of the Cordillera people to struggle for the creation of a genuine autonomous regional government; and 6) recognition of the CPDF's duty to fight for Philippine national sovereignty and democracy against foreign and other multinational exploiters of their natural resources.

The issues were presented by Andres Fernando of the Communist Party of the Philippines-Cordillera, Lawig of the NPA-Cordillera, Chadli and Sumkad of the NDF, and Fr. Ed Balicao, a Roman Catholic priest who serves as CPDF consultant to the NDF negotiating panel. The CPDF covers the provinces of Abra, Kalinga-Apayao, Ifugao, Mountain Province, Benguet, the city of Baguio and part of Nueva Vizcaya.



COVER STORIES

On today's significant issues and events

"Deeply rooted in the people"

How a priest's and a nun's quest for meaning led them to embrace the people's cause

It has been 10 years since Luis and Consuelo Jalandoni left the Philippines with their five-month-old son. Abroad, they lived as political exiles, helping firm up the foundation of the NDF's international work. But life abroad was not easy, especially at the onset. Louie and Connie had to endure more than the cold European winters. They had to bear being away from the warm companionship of family, friends and comrades. There were also no permanent or stable sources of financial support. They had to find jobs and work the standard eight hours, squeezing their heavy load of political work within this tight schedule. This meant giving up sleep because of late evening or overnight meetings; it also meant an endless succession of lost weekends.

In that decade of absence, they too celebrated the revolutionary movement's victories and grieved when they heard news of the killing of comrades they both knew. But all this, they had to do from a distance. Being central figures in the NDF's work abroad, Louie and Connie faced certain arrest if they returned. It took a ceasefire to bring them back home. Last Dec. 16, both returned to the Philippines to serve as consultants to the negotiating panel of the NDF. The following article is based on their interview with **LIBERATION**.

Search for meaning

Louie was born on Feb. 26, 1935, the scion of one of Negros' wealthiest landowning families. Except for a brief two years in a small private school in Silay, Negros Occidental, he was educated in La Salle Greenhills. In 1955, at the age of 20, Louie graduated *cum laude* with a Bachelor of Commerce degree, major in Accounting, from De La Salle. In 1956, he passed the board examination for Certified Public Accountants.

But that same year, he decided to enter the priesthood, "to fill an emptiness that made me crave for a life far removed from the way I had been brought up." He studied Philosophy and Theology at the San Carlos Seminary in Manila.

While he was in the seminary, Louie's father died, leaving him 85 hectares of prime sugar lands as his part of the inheritance. Having no desire to become a *hacendero*, Louie planned to distribute the land to the sugar workers. But he was dissuaded from doing so by his family. "They pleaded with me that this would only fuel discontent among the rest of the sugar workers and place undue pressure on the other *hacenderos* to do the same." Louie thus sold the land to his brother and used part of the money to construct houses and establish educational scholarships for sugar workers. "It is a decision that up to now still rankles in me. I know I could have decided differently."

In December 1962, Louie was ordained a priest. After doing parish work for a few months, he went to Rome and Munich for post-graduate studies. "When I returned in November 1967, I was assigned to a church-

run peasant cooperative project in southern Negros. It was here that my life took a new turn."

Louie was drawn into the struggles of peasant settlers and defended them against landgrabbers, among them Negros warlord Armando Gustilo. In July 1969, Louie was named Social Action Director for the Diocese of Bacolod. "I then became closely involved in the struggles of sugar workers and often joined them in their picket lines, where they were sometimes shot at by soldiers and hired goons."

Louie not only joined these strikes, but helped support the workers by donating the money left over from the sale of his inheritance. One of the biggest strikes launched during this period was that at Victorias, the biggest sugar milling company in Negros.

"At this point, I actively sympathized with the sugar workers' cause but I still had reservations about armed struggle." He himself, however, was witness to the brutal repression of workers at the picket line. "Because of this experience, I began to understand the need for workers and other oppressed people to have the means with which to defend themselves. By late 1971, I had accepted the necessity and justness of armed struggle. I had taken the quantum leap from reformist to revolutionary."

Subsequent discussions with committed youth led him to grasp more deeply the national democratic line. In August of 1972, Louie was elected a member of the National Executive Committee of the Christians for National Liberation (CNL), then an open national democratic organization. It had been founded six months before by Fr. Edicio de la Torre, SVD. In May 1972, Louie had also helped set up the Visayas chapter of the CNL.

But there was one other significant event that took place during the Victorias Milling Company strike. It was there that Louie met Consuelo Ledesma, a sister of the Religious of the Good Shepherd (RGS). She had been assigned to an RGS-run institution for wayward girls in Bacolod City. While there, she also volunteered her services to the Social Action Office in the diocese.



Zumei, Orampo and Jalandoni: After a decade of parting, a happy reunion

Without their knowing it, Louie and Connie had actually been living parallel lives years before they met. Like Louie, Connie was born into a wealthy, landowning Negrense family. She, too, had wanted to add meaning to her life when she entered the convent in the early '60s. "The life of the rich is empty," she explained. "What do you really do? I wanted to do something for the people. In a way, I found what I was looking for because the (RGS) order takes care of individuals with social problems, like poor people and drug addicts. *Pero kulang pa rin.*"

Connie was a principal at a small private school for girls in Cebu run by the RGS when the national democratic movement was rapidly advancing. Though she was not directly involved in the struggle, she avidly followed developments through the newspapers, attended seminars, and sometimes brought her pupils with her to attend rallies.

"I attended seminar after seminar. Practically every political group or personality in those days offered solutions to the Philippines' social problems. But what exactly was the problem? It was at a gathering presided over by Fr. (Ed) de la Torre that I first got a sensible explanation of what the problems were — imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism. It became all so clear to me. *Kaya lang, ang binanggit na solusyon ay reholusyon. Naku, para akong nakukuryente noon tuwing naririnig ko yung salitang reholusyon.* But it was at that point that I considered myself to have become a national democrat."

Connie, from then on, became more deeply involved in the sugar workers' struggles. With Louie and other comrades, she helped organize the militant National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW).

When martial law was declared, 20 soldiers raided the Bishop's house in Bacolod City to arrest Louie, but failed to capture him. Louie and many other national democrats had gone underground to escape detention. A year later, however, he and Connie were arrested. They were detained, first in Negros and then in Manila, till 1974. When they were released, Louie and Connie, now laicized, were married by Jaime Cardinal Sin.

"Soon after, we both plunged ourselves anew in the trade union movement, this time among industrial workers in Manila," said Louie. On May 1, 1975, they helped set up Bukluran, a church-labor center. They were also among the religious and lay people who helped organize the historic La Tondena strike in October 1975, and provided support for the series of



Fighting for their future: Children of political exiles join picket in The Hague

workers' strikes that followed.

Martial law authorities reacted with characteristic brutality. Harassment and mass arrests followed. A number of foreign priests who had supported the strikes were ordered to leave the country. A new presidential decree was enacted that banned strikes. By January 1976, Louie and Connie again went underground.

It was almost a year later, in December 1976, when they were sent abroad by the NDF Preparatory Committee to do international work.

Life and struggles abroad

Even before Louie and Connie went abroad, there had already been initiatives by expatriate Filipinos and foreigners who had been to the Philippines, to organize groups that would gather support for the progressive and revolutionary movements in the country. But Louie's designation in July 1977 as the official NDF international representative greatly boosted such initial efforts.

Among the first fruits of such efforts was the convening in 1980 of the Permanent People's Tribunal (PPT) on the Philippines. The PPT, composed of eminent jurists, lawyers, academicians and other prominent individuals, acted on a petition by the NDF in behalf of the Filipino people, and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in behalf of the Moro people. In its deliberations, the PPT found the Marcos dictatorship unfit to govern and declared that the NDF and MNLF were the legitimate representatives of the Filipino and Moro peoples, respectively.

"The tribunal's decision had a

strong impact on the NDF's efforts to broaden its reach and link up with as many positive political forces abroad as possible. It also led to the consolidation, expansion or creation of Philippine solidarity groups in several countries in Western Europe," said Louie.

The many advances that have been made since then have somehow compensated for the hardships that Louie, Connie and other comrades had undergone during the initial stages of their work. "In the course of our stay abroad, we have met revolutionaries and progressives from so many countries, whose struggles are very inspiring. There are many lessons to be learned from them," said Louie. "Revolutionary and progressive peoples in capitalist countries have also been showing their support for the Philippines in warm and creative ways. There are some foreigners whose commitment for the Filipino people's struggle is very admirable."

Louie cited students at the University of Ghent in Belgium, who staged a "hunger meal" in support of the Philippines. "They paid \$4 for a meal, but received only about 50 cents worth of food. The \$3.50 was then contributed for the support of people's struggles in our country. Meanwhile, the participants were invited to a slide show and discussion on the Philippines."

"In Limburg, West Germany," continued Louie, "our supporters washed cars and donated what they earned to the Philippines. In Dublin, Ireland, a picket was held for more than six months in front of the US embassy to demand justice for Fr. Rudy Romano. In Holland, solidarity groups held

'hunger fasts' from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. and contributed what they usually spent on food, to the political prisoners in the country. While fasting, the participants held discussions on the plight and struggles of political detainees in the Philippines."

Connie added, "*Hahanga ka sa mga kasama roon. Napaka-committed kahit mahirap ang gawain. Pagod na pagod ka talaga. May meeting ka from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Uuwi ka para magluto, kumain at gumampan ng ibang gawaing bahay. May iba ka na namang meeting nang 8 p.m. Very hectic ang pace dahil kailangang sundin ang capitalist time system. Pero sa kabila nito, walang nagla-lie low.*"

"Like a dry sponge"

Louie and Connie have a long list of things they want to do, now that they have a chance to stay in the Philippines for a few weeks.

Said Connie about her arrival: "I just wanted to enjoy being in the Philippines, to eat *puto* . . . *Parang niya-yakap ako ng hangin, parang walang gap of 10 years mula nang umalis kami.* I wanted to see everything; I felt like a dry sponge that could not catch anything no matter how much water you put in. It's as if I haven't seen anything yet."

There are close relatives, some of them ailing, as there are comrades and friends to renew ties with. There is Negros to visit, where they want to see old comrades, to talk to peasant settlers and sugar workers, to visit tombs of relatives who died while they were in exile, to pay their respects to the martyrs of Escalante . . . There is also that burning desire to join mass actions, to "feel the pulse of the mass movement."

When asked if they had any regrets in joining the movement and leaving

behind a life of wealth and comfort, Louie answered: "I feel actually quite happy with having become part of the national democratic movement. I've found the friendship I sought and close ties with the workers, the peasants, the youth and comrades. And also I found that in the movement, I've learned a lot and this has helped to develop my capacity to contribute to it. And even my relations with my family and relatives have been enriched with my involvement."

"It's like being part of a big undertaking, with a very noble and just cause," Louie said. "I think joining the movement is like being deeply rooted in the Filipino people. I feel my identity as a Filipino has helped in becoming a part of the movement."

Whether here as visiting *balikbayans* or abroad as political exiles, Louie and Connie will always be Filipino revolutionaries at heart. ■

"We do not seek belligerency status from the talks"

An interview with NDF international representative Luis Jalandoni

Q: What is the role of NDF international work during the ceasefire period?

A: The primary role of international solidarity work during the ceasefire period is to mobilize the strongest possible political, diplomatic and material or humanitarian support for the people's organizations and movements in order to strengthen the NDF negotiating panel's position. For example, we would like to mobilize support for campaigns launched by the Philippine peasant movement for genuine land reform because this would in turn strengthen the NDF panel's stand regarding this issue. A secondary but nonetheless significant stress is mobilizing direct support for the NDF position in the negotiations.

Second, we would like to expose and firmly oppose the increased interference or intervention of US imperialism and other imperialist forces that want to sabotage the peace effort. The American people and progressive organizations in the US should play a significant role in this effort. They can oppose increased US military aid to the Philippines as well as statements by top US officials which advocate a military solution to the insurgency or which cast doubt on the peace negotiations.

Q: What forms will such support take?

A: Committees may be set up in support of the peace effort. Such committees, which will have a broad character, will most likely launch campaigns on the Philippine situation and on the demands of the NDF. They may be organized on a country-



Jalandoni: Firming up international support for the NDF

wide or region-wide basis. Fact-finding missions composed of representatives of media, prestigious personalities, diplomats, etc., may also be sent to the Philippines by these committees to give substance to the information campaigns.

Q: Have any international organizations already expressed support for the peace effort?

A: So far, 34 members of the European Parliament have expressed support for the NDF's proposal for 100 days of peace. Nobel Peace Prize winner Sean MacBride, Francois Houtart of Louvain University and Jeff Ullburghs, a member of the European Parliament, issued a joint statement supporting the peace process in the Philippines. They said that the Philippines would contribute to

the achievement of peace in the region and in the world.

Others, including the World Council of Churches and Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Perez Esquivel, have also declared open support for the peace efforts here. We also plan to harness the support of friends and contacts in organizations such as the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organization of African Unity and the Socialist International to help people's organizations and movements in the Philippines and to oppose interference and intervention from forces abroad opposed to the peace process.

Q: What is the present extent of the NDF's international work?

A: Solidarity committees have been established since the early

'70s in the United States and in Western Europe. In the latter region, the designation of an NDF international representative in 1971 greatly boosted the previous initiatives taken by Filipinos and supportive foreigners. In Asia, Australia and New Zealand, solidarity groups first came to existence around 1977 or 1978. In Western Europe alone, there are already 15 solidarity committees supportive of the Filipino people's struggles and movements, including the NDF. These committees are in West Germany, Italy, Holland, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Sweden, Greece, Belgium, France, Austria, Denmark, Norway, Spain, Luxembourg and Switzerland.

In the US and Canada, we have groups that undertake information campaigns and lobby work in the US Congress to convince legislators to oppose increased US military aid to the Philippines, for instance. In Latin America, support groups have sprung up in Mexico and Venezuela. We also have solidarity groups in Australia, New Zealand, Japan and Hong Kong.

We have no solidarity committees as yet in Africa, but we have warm relations with some officials of the African National Congress, the South West Africa People's Organization, and the frontline states like Mozambique and Angola. We have also established contact with the Department of National Liberation Movements of the National Liberation Front of Algeria, specifically with the Department's Council for Solidarity and Friendship with Peoples.

Another aspect of NDF international work is organizing overseas Filipinos and getting them to participate in and support the Philippine struggle. The potentials for this undertaking are great, considering that there are at least 1.5 million Filipinos in the US and around 200,000 in Western Europe.

The third aspect is diplomatic work, wherein we endeavor to gain the support of governments, political parties, liberation movements and various international forums.

Q: Has there been any change in the degree of support for the Philippine revolution since the February uprising?

A: The overall effect of the February uprising was a raised level of consciousness regarding the Philippines worldwide. Everywhere, there was deep admiration for the Filipino people. In fact, a Dutch journalist said that it is the Filipino people who should receive the (Nobel) Peace Prize. And when I spoke at a gathering in Brussels, Belgium, and I was introduced as coming from the NDF in the Philippines, I received a standing ovation.

There has been no diminution of support among the anti-imperialist organizations with a comprehensive understanding of the people's struggles in the Philippines. After analytical discussions with them on the Aquino government, they understand that no substantial changes have yet taken place in the country. They realize the need for continued support. The only thing they ask us is, given the new situation, what types of support are now appropriate?

We have also been able to hold on to the support given by sectors abroad to their counterpart sectors in the Philippines. Trade union support for militant labor in the Philippines has not diminished, for instance.

But with some agencies and political parties with whom we have not had deeper relations, and whose support was mostly linked to the abuses of the Marcos dictatorship, there has been some lessening of support.

Q: Why? Has continued militarization in the countryside not been adequately projected abroad?

A: Sad to say, the ongoing militarization in the countryside has not been given much attention in the international media. In fact, earlier this year, what was given more projection was the AFP's position regarding the NDF. But since the burial of slain labor leader Rolando Olalia last Nov. 20, there has been a more positive projection of the progressive and revolutionary movement in the country. The signing of the preliminary



Jalandoni: Belying AFP claims on arms smuggling

ceasefire agreement on Nov. 27 also gave a tremendous boost to the NDF's image abroad. This was especially so when the NDF made efforts prior to Dec. 10 to save the ceasefire accord in the face of the AFP's distorted interpretation of the agreement. On Dec. 10 itself, the people's support for the NDF was given wide media coverage abroad, through reports on the rallies at Plaza Roma, in Bacolod City and in Samal, Bataan.

Q: What can you say about the AFP's accusation that the NDF is using the peace talks to gain belligerency status internationally?

A: First of all, a status of belligerency is not a matter of agreement between two parties. It is a situation that emerges according to certain factors — it is there *ipso facto*. The most important among these factors are that a political force should have: 1) control of a considerable portion of the territory; 2) the support of a considerable portion of the population; and 3) an army that is disciplined and under its control.

The NDF is *not* seeking belligerency status from the peace negotiations, because a status of belligerency emerges *ipso facto*, and is not subject to negotiations. This accusation by the AFP should not detract from the main issue of upholding the ceasefire agreement and pursuing the substantive talks on the fundamental problems of the Filipino people.

It is actually up to international political forces, like foreign governments and countries, to decide if such a state (of belligerency) has in fact, emerged. If they should determine that this is so, this should include a recognition that the conflict in the Philippines is an internal one, and they should not intervene to help either side.

But what can happen is that this would put tremendous political and diplomatic pressure on the US government to recognize (the status of belligerency) also. This in turn would give a strong impetus to the American people and progressive individuals and organizations to pressure the US Congress and other US officials to recognize such a status.

Q: Are there countries or political parties abroad that have extended formal recognition to the NDF?

A: Some important political parties and international forums as well as non-governmental organizations (NGO) have given various forms of recognition and political support to the NDF. One example is the Permanent People's Tribunal, composed of 60 NGOs. In 1980, it recognized the NDF as the legitimate representative of the Filipino people.

PASOK, which is at present the ruling party in Greece, has been giving open political support to the NDF. Some other smaller political parties like the Pacifist Socialist Party and the Progressive Radical Party in The Netherlands extended formal recognition to the NDF in 1981 and 1985, respectively. Both parties have fairly strong influence in the Europe-wide peace movement.

Q: What is the status of NDF relations with socialist countries like China, the Soviet Union and Vietnam?

A: The NDF has at present no formal relations with these countries. But in various international conferences or gatherings, the NDF meets the representatives of these countries and there is friendly interaction. In the long-term, the NDF program calls for developing warm and close relations with Third World and socialist countries.

Some socialist countries such as Vietnam and Cuba, have also shown support and interest by sending representatives to attend the burial of labor leader Olalia, for instance, and some big gatherings of patriotic multisectoral alliances in the country. Vietnam, in particular, helps the Filipino people's struggle indirectly by its militant opposition to US imperialist policies worldwide.

Q: What is the NDF's stand regarding Kampuchea?

A: The NDF holds that the correct solution to the problem in Kampuchea is a peaceful negotiated political settlement to uphold the principle of self-determination by the Kampuchean

people. There should be assurance of non-intervention by imperialist forces and this would include the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Kampuchean territory. In principle, the NDF has stated that it does not approve of the presence of Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea although we also realize that there were excesses committed by the Pol Pot regime.

In sum, we believe that all efforts should be undertaken to find a peaceful political settlement of this problem. Such a conflict is only being used by imperialist forces, especially the US, for their advancement. As the conflict continues, it weakens the unity of anti-imperialist forces throughout the world. Especially for the sake of the people's struggles in Southeast Asia, a peaceful political settlement should be achieved.



New thrust: Uniting in struggle to support the peace effort

Q: Is it true that the NDF has been soliciting arms from abroad?

A: That is not true. These allegations have been made by the AFP and by rightist institutions in the US like the Heritage Foundation, in order to justify increased US military aid to the Philippines as well as increased US interference in Philippine affairs. It is widely accepted that the NDF and the NPA have grown over the years in a self-reliant way.

Q: More recent reports have it that the NDF has been getting arms from Vietnam, Japan, Australia and from the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

A: Again, these are nothing but unsubstantiated reports or allegations. The NDF denies this unequivocally. We should look at the motivations behind such allegations. These fabricated reports tend to justify a military solution to the insurgency, which is in contravention to the desire of the majority of the Filipino people to arrive at a comprehensive political settlement of their basic problems.

Q: Does the NDF have relations with so-called international terrorist organizations?

A: It is the NDF's policy not to relate with organizations abroad that undertake forms of warfare which are considered dangerous to the civilian population and are not in accordance with the principles and discipline the NDF considers important. In the first place, the NDF's basis of unity with such organizations is not clear. The political, diplomatic and overall international work of the NDF should not be jeopardized by relating with these types of organizations. (I purposely did not use the term "terrorist" since its meaning is a subject of controversy. It has been used indiscriminately to refer even to the NDF and other legitimate national liberation movements.)



From Australia: An outpouring of solidarity



Reaching out for peace: But where will hopeful beginnings lead to?

A peace imperilled

AFP steps up acts of sabotage as talks near substantive phase

For members of the national democratic movement, the year 1986 has ended in haste and left a lot of questions unanswered: Will the Aquino government agree to the National Democratic Front's proposal for a lasting and durable peace? Or will it succumb to pressures from the military and the US government not to enter into a political settlement with the revolutionary movement?

And as the military leadership purposely and deviously continues to make its own distorted interpretations of the ceasefire agreement, another more important question has cropped up: Can peace be achieved through negotiations considering the weakening influence of liberal and progressive elements in the government?

AFP acts of sabotage

From the start of the preliminary talks between the NDF and the Aquino government, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) has consistently shown its sharp opposition to the possibility of a political settlement with the underground forces. This opposition seems to have grown deeper and become more evident even as AFP Chief Gen. Fidel Ramos keeps on mouthing pronouncements of "giving peace a chance."

In fact, a devious and obvious scheme designed to project the revolutionary movement as unreasonable and insincere has unfolded. Knowing that the communications system of the underground is no match to that of the

well-organized and well-equipped AFP, the military leaks accounts of alleged reports from its regional unified commands of NPA violations of the ceasefire agreement. Before the NDF panelists have time to check the reports, these have already been splattered across the front pages of all the newspapers, making it appear that the NDF is insincere. Any clarification or denial would have less impact and is usually given less prominent exposure.

However, the latest act of sabotage by the AFP — or at least, the latest to be uncovered so far — is the issuance of guidelines by the AFP Chief of Staff to all military field commanders, covering the carrying of firearms by NPA guerrillas, patrol operations of both the AFP and NPA, and revolutionary taxation. The Ramos directive states that NPA guerrillas are not allowed to carry firearms in barangays, towns and cities. It said only 50 NPA members are authorized to carry firearms and that in cases where the NPAs forget to leave their firearms, these should be deposited in local PC-INP stations or local ceasefire offices. Moreover, Ramos' guidelines ominously advised the NPAs "not to roam around" wearing known military uniforms such as fatigue, khaki and camouflage. On progressive taxation, the guidelines stated that this should be reported to the local ceasefire committees, implying that taxation by the NDF was a hostile act and a violation of the ceasefire agreement.

In a letter to President Aquino sent through the government negotiating

panel, the NDF vehemently protested Ramos' premature issuance of the ceasefire guidelines. Said the NDF: "The AFP has acted in contempt of (authorized) bodies. It has preempted the authority of the National Ceasefire Committee (NCC), which has yet to finalize the official guidelines." Added Frank Pascual, NDF representative to the NCC: "The whole guidelines by Ramos are a gross misinterpretation, and even a deliberate distortion of both the memorandum agreements on the preliminary ceasefire and on safety and immunity guarantees. Nowhere in the agreement did we surrender our right to carry arms."

"The NDF cannot tolerate this contemptible act of the AFP high command to sabotage the ceasefire agreement and the peace talks altogether," further noted the NDF protest letter to Aquino. "We hereby hold the government responsible for disciplining its armed forces. Otherwise, our mutual efforts to achieve peace and understanding will all come to naught."

Meanwhile, the National Ceasefire Committee has ruled that the Samal, Bataan rally by the NDF constituted a violation of the ceasefire accord. While the NDF respects the decision, the ruling cannot detract from the obvious mass following that the NDF enjoys among broad sections of the rural population. The Samal, Bataan rally clearly proved the NDF's political and moral authority to represent the revolutionary forces and the masses under its influence.

On the other hand, Ramos' statement that the "rebels frightened the local population" in a television interview that same day of the rally, only made him look foolish as newspapers widely reported on the masses' warm reception of the NDF panel and NPA fighters.

Stumbling blocks

Even as the two sides try to iron out differences over the implementing guidelines, several stumbling blocks still need to be overcome as the peace talks reach the substantive phase this early January. In an interview with *LIB*, NDF chief negotiator Satur Ocampo said there is a great disparity between the proposed agenda of the government and that of the NDF. Earlier, government representative Teofisto Guingona said that they plan to offer the revolutionary movement rehabilitation and rural development programs in the countryside, plus what the government has termed "amnesty with honor."

Contrary to earlier declarations by President Aquino recognizing the "economic and social roots of the insurgency," the government proposal has turned out to be a disappointment. "The government proposal is, at most, a palliative," Ocampo noted. "It will not cure the basic causes of the people's misery. The Aquino government has gradually retreated from its original premise that to solve the insurgency, it must solve the root causes. Right now, they're only treating the symptoms."

"If the Aquino government, however, persists in such a narrow framework, then the prospects for achieving peace will grow dimmer," Ocampo added.

Other members of the national democratic movement share the same view. Said Lina, a CNL activist, "When Aquino called for a ceasefire during her first days in power, she said she wanted to redress the legitimate grievances of those who resorted to armed struggle. Her statement was warmly received by NDF members and the invitation for a dialogue was accepted." Recent developments, however, have aroused fear among national demo-

crats like Lina that the government's real objective in the peace talks is not to resolve the root causes of the insurgency but simply to undermine the revolutionary movement through deceptive means. Not a few have warned about the scheme of some government and military factions to subvert the support of the masses away from the NDF, to create disunity within the revolutionary movement, and to prepare the moral ground for launching continuous and more aggressive military operations.

To be sure, it is not only the revolutionary movement which has something to gain from the peace talks. The talks are also giving the state the needed time to consolidate a badly battered and gravely demoralized AFP. With AFP Chief Gen. Fidel Ramos and Defense Minister Rafael Iletto at the helm of the AFP-MND establishment, the state is quietly sharpening its option for exercising the military solution should the peace process fail.

Moreover, the government is trying to tempt the NPA guerrillas into surrendering by offering them amnesty and rehabilitation programs, even allotting P1 billion from an already meager budget. In addition, they have resorted to bribing NPAs and offering them money in exchange for their arms. Apparently, the government and the military are playing as wide a field as possible to fence in the revolutionary forces.

To further contain them, the military is presently using the terms "population center" and "populated area" interchangeably, as part of the scheme to disarm Red fighters. Earlier, in an emergency meeting on Dec. 10, the NDF and government panels had agreed that revolutionary forces will not carry firearms in population centers. The AFP, however, has cunningly interpreted the term "population cen-

ter" as any area which is populated.

"As a revolutionary force, we have the right to carry arms," said Frank Pascual, NDF representative to the NCC. "We are not covered by the Omnibus Arms Code. The NDF has its own political program. It has its own army. And in areas under our control, it has the allegiance of the people. We therefore have the right to carry arms and the responsibility to protect our people and ourselves."

Despite such serious differences, NDF panelists have stated that the entire revolutionary movement will continue to abide by the ceasefire agreement in its earnest quest for peace. In an interview with *LIB*, Ka Esperanza of the NPA-Southern Tagalog Regional Operational Command said: "Welcome sa amin ang ceasefire, at susunod kami sa anumang mapagkasunduan. Pero pag nagkaroon ng violations ang military, ang magiging problema namin ay kung paano kukumbinsihin ang mga kasama at mga masa na huwag munang umakasyon at pabayaang munang mag-imbetiga ang ceasefire committee."

On the other hand, Manuel Valera Quizon, designated NDF representative to the Central Luzon Regional Ceasefire Committee said NDF-Central Luzon will respect and protect the ceasefire. In a press conference in a guerrilla front in Pampanga, he scored the increasing military deployment of troops in all the eight provinces of Central Luzon. He said peace will reign only if the people achieve justice and dignity. In Central Luzon, Quizon said this means genuine land reform and demilitarization.

Meanwhile, some patriotic elements within the AFP, have expressed genuine support for the peace talks. In an interview for the first time with *LIB*, a national democrat soldier said there are many in the rank-and-file of the AFP who sincerely wish for the success of the negotiations between the NDF and the government. "We will try to convince our fellow soldiers to uphold the welfare of the masses by obeying the ceasefire agreement," he said.

More than anyone, however, it is the revolutionary forces who have long desired and struggled for peace. For 17 years, they have given their lives to the cause of the people in order to bring them justice and dignity. As the substantive phase of the peace talks begin, they can only wish that the Aquino government will fully respond to the people's cause. For its own part, the NDF has presented its agenda for peace, based on the people's long-standing demands for basic social, political and economic changes. It is now up to the Aquino government to heed these popular demands — to prove its claim as a government that serves the people's interests. ■



NDF-Central Luzon: Exploring all avenues for political settlement

Stumbling blocks

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NDF-Central Luzon: Exploring all avenues for political settlement



Eager pupils: Wielding literacy as a weapon to transform society

MAINSTREAM

Developments in the people's movements

School for the poor

Literacy program pioneered in NDF areas in Northeastern Mindanao

The peculiarity of a school built by the National Democratic Front in Northeastern Mindanao does not bother Roberto, 10, and his seven-year-old sister. Every morning, with home-made bags slung on their shoulders, they would hop along well-beaten mountain trails, past cold springs, giant logs and familiar forests.

Just when the sun had fully risen, they would reach their school, a little hut perched on top of a steep hill. It is a peasant family's home, made of wood from roof to floor. The entire schoolhouse consists of a "blackboard" canvas cut out from an old tent, a few pieces of chalk, seven classmates, and "Ma'am" — an 18-year-old lass named Mila who likes to play the guitar.

The hut is humble and modest. But for the people of Northeastern Mindanao, where grown-ups who can read and write are a rarity, a school like this is a dream-come-true. For Roberto and his sister Bing-Bing, it is the only one they've got.

Like other projects of the revolutionary movement, the idea of setting

up schools — a literacy program, to be exact — was borne out of the need articulated by the people in the NDF barrios. "*Matagal na nilang hinihingi ito, kaya noong itayo ng NDF ang programa, mabilis ang suporta nila,*" says Sister Lisa, a nun who supervises the program.

In Northeastern Mindanao, it took only four people to start it off: Lisa, who had left the security of her convent to live a "life of faith and service" in the hills; Khalib, one of the few Red fighters in the main guerrilla unit who finished grade school; and Aklan, a 23-year-old son of a peasant who went home with a diploma, only to find the corpses of his parents and baby sister who had been massacred by soldiers. Another staffer, a girl who supervised the literacy program with the help of the New People's Army in the region, had died in a tactical offensive in July.

"At first, we didn't know how to start," Sister Lisa confessed. "It was easy to set up simple schools like these, but we wanted to institute something revolutionary, a system of

teaching that will do away with feudal dependent relations between teachers and pupils, and at the same time evoke their fullest potentials while they both learn."

Sister Lisa was an educator before she became a full-time revolutionary. Along with Aklan, she had to go to Manila in early 1985 to learn from a teachers' group trying to evolve revolutionary yet simple education courses.

In mid-1985, they went back to Mindanao, now prepared and more confident. "The first thing we did," recalled Aklan, "was to call mass meetings in the areas we considered as priorities." This meant barrios which are consolidated NDF territories, barrios where there is a need or a demand from the people to set up schools, or places where there are no existing public schools or teachers.

In the meeting, Aklan said, they broke the happy news. "We also explained to the people that they had to set up the schools themselves and that our role would be to extend the necessary help." After that, the response was overwhelming. "We found out that not only were the children willing to go to school. Adults were also as eager to learn how to read and write."

Right then and there, the masses decided to set up classes for both children and adults. "We had to separate both groups, *dahil nahihiya ang ibang matanda na kasama ang mga bata,*" Aklan said.

After the consultation meetings, the people also offered their homes for the daily classes or built simple schoolhouses. They promised to feed the teachers and ensure their security.

One peculiar thing about the schoolhouses is that they were built deep inside remote areas. Sister Lisa said this was necessary to make sure there would be no disruptions such as military patrols and operations while classes are going on. More importantly, parents must be assured that their children would be safe.

"*Hinahanap nga ng kaaway ang mga eskwelahan,*" she said. All the children are aware of the risks. When they would be stopped and questioned by the soldiers on their way to school, their standard response was that they were going to go farming, despite the pencils, pieces of paper and one or two notebooks with them. "*May isang bata nga ang tinanong nang paulit-ulit. Nang ayaw tigilan, umiyak na lang sa takot,*" Lisa recalled amusingly.

To further democratize the educational program, each barrio was allowed to choose its own teachers, based on their attitudes and keenness for security considerations. Of course, they must have also reached Grade 5 at least. After selecting the teachers, the pilot group of Sister Lisa set out to train them, design modules and curricula for both pupils and tutors.

Vina, one of the first teachers to be trained, said their curriculum was some kind of a crash course. It included the study of Philippine history and government, the educational system,

general principles of teaching, general principles of reading and writing, the Paolo Freire method, and module- and syllabus-making. The whole course finished off with a practicum.

The most difficult to absorb, she said, was the Paolo Freire method (named after a progressive Brazilian educator) because she was not used to it. Sister Lisa explained that the method is different from the "banking approach" to education where a teacher spoonfeeds and even imposes her knowledge on her pupils.

Instead, the Paolo Freire method requires children to think for themselves, with the teacher asking them questions at the start. This way, education once again becomes the means by which people can perceive, interpret and criticize and finally transform society. Literacy becomes a weapon for social change, for vast numbers of poor peasants who are given a sense of purpose and identity.

The children are not forced to memorize the letters of the alphabet using alien concepts such as "a is for apple." On the contrary, they learn the sound of each letter of the alphabet by trying to recall when they make the particular sounds.

The children's creativity is surprising, Vina said. Besides, the system has evoked the full participation of each pupil, even his eagerness to contribute to the learning process.

The students' progress is even more surprising. In less than a year, they learn to read and write. Many of the students who were in the first batch in



The gun is not his only weapon

1985 are now on their second grade, studying numeracy. After that, said Lisa, they are ready for the third grade, which consists of studying "revolutionary literature."

So far, since the institution of the project in August 1985, 12 barrios have been covered. Classes for children are held Mondays to Wednesdays, while teenagers and adults hold simultaneous classes on Thursdays and Fridays. Each class has at least two teachers, but pupils are limited to 10-15 to give each one full attention. Within the NPA, a core group of Red fighters in each platoon is trained by the program staff and placed in charge of teaching their comrades how to read and write. One of the appointed tutors said his job consists of scheduling the lessons and following up closely on the progress of the learners.

Outside of these areas, there is a strong clamor to expand the program. Sister Lisa said they eventually plan to do this. The NDF in the region is even considering "legalizing" the program, which means getting accreditation from the Ministry of Education and Culture and getting institutions to fund the project. But knowing the red tape inside the government bureaucracy, Lisa says this may still be a long way off.

For now, pupils like Roberto would have to content themselves with classrooms without desks. Watching them, however, there were no signs of discontent. At 10 a.m. of each class day, they take recess like the privileged children in Manila's best schools. At lunch, they go home or share their "*baon*" of rice and gabi or fish. After school, they fetch water or do some chores for the family that plays school "host" to them.

Roberto does not mind all these. A good guitar-player at 10, he could say only that school's fun. One day, he wants to become a school teacher too like "Ma'am." **Pen Guerrero**



Never too old to learn: Adult education class in Mindanao

UNITY AND FELLOWSHIP IN PROGRESSIVE INSTITUTIONS

Sister Justin works in the city, holds down an office job and is engaged in legal struggle. "It is very difficult," she says, "to celebrate a revolutionary Christmas when you work in the legal sphere. In any case, we try to make the traditional Christmas celebration more meaningful and relevant. The goal is to veer away from the commercialized, consumerist and wasteful festivities that characterize most celebrations today. We try to re-direct the attention of the middle classes to the true spirit of Christmas, which is the Love and Sacrifice incarnate in the daily struggles of the basic masses.

"In our offices, we still have the Kris Kringle, and give each other little gifts, but we try to be austere in these hard times. To sympathizers and friends we can trust, we give revolutionary Christmas cards, along with copies of *LIB*. We also have a collection box that we fill with gifts in cash or in kind that we have "sacrificed" especially for the season. These go to the strike fund of trade unions, to urban poor organizations, or to the families of salvage victims.

"We also go carolling, in homes of sympathizers and offices of progressive organizations. Although we sing traditional carols, we also sing progressive Christmas songs like *Diwa ng Pasko* as well as nationalist songs. The carolling sessions always include a short discussion on the situation of the people. In this way, we are able to educate the middle classes and church people, while drawing support for the people's mass struggle from a wider public.

"We also organize educational exposure trips during this season, encouraging the more affluent to share what they have with workers, and visit them in their picket lines. The participants spend their time sharing experiences, discussing and integrating with the workers. Then we have a short program, followed by a liturgical service. The response is almost always encouraging.

"The Christmas liturgies in our institutions are always re-interpreted and contextualized in the present situation. Before the liturgy begins, we explain that as Christians, we are there to celebrate the Lord's birth as well as to meditate on our achievements and shortcomings in bringing about total human liberation for the poor and the oppressed.

"There is a part in the Christmas liturgy in which we acknowledge and thank certain persons who have done pioneering work, or given much of themselves in service to the basic sectors. Some conservatives have raised their eyebrows at some of the names mentioned, for whenever we can, we acknowledge the contributions of known CNL and NPA religious, both living and dead, like Nilo Valerio and Pites Bernardo.

"In the offertory, we emphasize that we should offer our services and our selves, and if need be, our lives - following the example of Our Lord. In the eucharistic celebration, we have experimented with different material, especially when we have guests from the basic sectors. Instead of using wafers, for example, we use native *balinghoy*, kamote or rice, and *basi* or other local wines. For the basic masses, this comes nearer to reality. We also use only one plate and cup, which we pass around. This is to symbolize our equality, unity and fellowship before God and His struggling people.

"We end with nationalist or liberational community singing, linking arms or binding ourselves with symbolic chains or rattan as an indication that we are all equally in bondage, and that we are united in the struggle to be free."

Christmas in the

How revolutionaries celebrate the Yuletide season in the

For this issue, LIB went to the different regions, guerrilla fronts and around Metro Manila to discover and illustrate ways in which revolutionaries and the organized masses celebrate Christmas. The stories show how the traditional Philippine



Simple joys of Christmas: A time for reunion with one's family.

CHRISTMAS ON THE MINDANAO FRONT

"Some people think that revolutionaries no longer celebrate Christmas, but we still do," said Dina, as she spoke of Christmas in a guerrilla front in Southern Mindanao. "In fact, it has become even more meaningful for us, because the Communist Party anniversary follows Christmas Day. The reestablishment of the CPP in the Philippines is one of the most important events in our lives. It is because of the revolutionary leadership that many people have awakened and are actively participating in the national democratic revolution. Because of this, our revolutionary struggle has reached its present level of development.

"Now the masses' lives are more meaningful, brimming with hope and promise. For these reasons, the celebration of the entire season is more meaningful. This is expressed in the way the masses welcome us. They expect us to drop by on Christmas Day. *Nagtatampo pa nga pag di ka pumunta*. They prepare special party food, like *suman* and *bibingka*; they cook chickens just for the occasion. *E, parang alkansya pa naman ang manok sa kanila, pero kahit tumanggi tayo, ihahain pa rin nila ito*. On our part, we are expected to share with them the latest developments in the revolutionary struggle, and to present a program.

"But it is in the guerrilla fronts that we really hold a complete celebration with programs and feasting. Even little children join; they are experts in the *koryo*, the interpretation of songs through dance and body movements. Since most of the Mindanao masses are Visayans who love to sing, the programs are always interspersed with songs composed extemporaneously, as well as with traditional and revolutionary songs.

"Christmas is also a time for visiting friends and relatives.

underground

cities and countryside

Christmas is being transformed by people who have themselves been transformed by the revolution. As the people look forward to eventual triumph, they anticipate a New Year that is abundant, truly joyful and authentically free.



friends and comrades in the struggle

The masses invite their children who work and study in the urban areas to come home, and make sure their children meet the comrades. We are treated like long-lost kinsmen, and expected to explain the revolution to their young ones.

"For the NPA, however, things are slightly different. *Ito kasi ang panahon na pinaka-lax ang kaaway, lalo na sa kalunsuran. Alam mo na ang mga sundalo, mahilig magdilihensya at mamasko ng pera, pulutan at alak sa panahong ito. Ang Christmas celebration niyan, siyempre may alak.* So we have to check conditions all the time, and be vigilant.

"In the urban areas, where we live with allies from the middle forces (it is difficult to maintain underground houses since our urban areas here are very small), we help decorate the house and prepare food for the guests. The allies surprise us with gifts of food and other items. Once they noticed that my shoes were worn out, and so I received new sneakers for Christmas, as well as fruitcake. I gave them a revolutionary Christmas card I had made myself. But usually our presence on the 25th is all that they expect. *Hindi nila iniisip o inaasahan na magbigay pa tayo ng regalo.*

"In the countryside, the masses make even bigger sacrifices willingly for the comrades. I remember a child studying in the barrio school, who told me, *'Tiya, ito ang baon kong beinte sentimos. Di ko naman kailangan. Ibili mo na lang ng bala para sa mga kasama.'* I was truly touched.

"Noong una, medyo burgis ang tingin ko sa Christmas. Para lang sa kasiyahan ko at ng ilang taong malapit sa akin. I believed that the only way to make another person happy was to buy him a gift. Pero ngayon, bilang mga kasama, wala naman tayong pera o kayamanan na maireregalo. So we offer our services instead, the work of our hands, but more importantly, we offer ourselves for the liberation of our people."

A SIMPLE FEAST IN NORTHWESTERN SAMAR

Totong is short and stout, with a chubby face and an engaging smile. His appearance belies his past experience in the struggle, which included a stint with revolutionary counter-intelligence, and territorial work involving education, organizing, and, as he says, "a little of everything."

On Christmas celebrations in Samar NDF areas, Totong recounted: "On the 25th, by tradition, each family has a get-together and a small feast — very simple, just *biko* and *suman*. But the comrades are always invited to these gatherings. The bigger and more festive celebration, however, is on the 26th — *iyon ang pinakapasko sa amin*. Then, the masses would arrive in the barrio or clearing and start to build shelters or *bahay-bahayan* made of *pakul* (wild banana) leaves around the makeshift stage. Each barrio representative would bring in his own group's large *calderos* and other cooking utensils.

"Before the program, we discuss what to do in case of an emergency, like an unexpected enemy attack — the commands, the routes of safety and retreat. Then we would start formally by singing the *Internationale*, using a microphone and stereo system lent to us by our rich peasant allies. This is needed because the celebration lasts from morning till night-time, with as many as 20 barrios represented. In one area, the celebration was held inside a large cave that accommodated over 3,000 people.

"The NDF and Party cadres next deliver an assessment of the developments in the revolution as the year ends. Then there would be singing, dancing and cultural performances. We have a play entitled '*Nasudnong Demokratikong Prente*,' or the United Democratic Front, in which the problems and aspirations of the people are presented. I am always cast as a member of the national bourgeoisie because I'm fat. Whenever we present the abuses of the military, or show how the masses are being exploited, many in the audience would shed tears. They would cheer up when we would dramatize our victorious NPA offensives. In fact, we have a song, '*Ambus sa Laygayon*,' sung to the tune of '*Ang Pasko ay Sumapit*,' which describes the December 26 ambush of a notorious military officer and his men.

"At this time, we also offer general amnesty to all informers who have not incurred blood debts against the people. Our offer is usually accepted, and quite a number of informers surrender during this period.

"But you know, in our place, the true spirit of Christmas lives the year round. We always have a happy time, with everyone warm and friendly. No one curses or drinks to excess, even during the holidays. Visitors are always warmly received. You can sleep anywhere or leave your carabao anywhere, and no one will bother you or steal your carabao. It is really peaceful.

"It is very much unlike Manila, where you don't even know your neighbor or the person next to you. *Walang pakialaman; walang pansinan*. If you want to know where peace on earth and goodwill among men abound, go to the places where the revolution has taken root."



Christmas lauriat: NPAs take a break from daily fare

DRAMATIZING A LOCAL FABLE IN LEYTE

In 1985, the masses in a small NDF area in Leyte had their fourth Christmas celebration, and they expected a novel and unique presentation. They built a stage made of big tree branches surrounded by streamers imprinted with revolutionary slogans, with a red flag at the center. It was located in a clearing large enough to accommodate 500 people from three barrios in Northern Leyte. Beside the clearing, people were preparing *pansit miki*, *suman na malagkit*, chicken and coffee.



Young fighters: Live actors in a real-life drama of struggle

"It hadn't been like that a few years back," narrated Rosita, an NDF cadre. In 1982, the first celebration involved only one barrio and was very simple — just a short program and no feasting. When the masses in the other barrios heard about it, however, they also wanted their own celebration. So instead of separate barrio-level celebrations, it was decided to have one joint activity, and the inter-barrio celebration has been a tradition since.

"The 1985 presentation was unique in that the program committee presented a special number that focused on the need for better organization in the revolutionary struggle — a dramatization of a local fable, 'The Deer and the Snail.' We made the costumes ourselves and erected props.

"The story went: The deer chanced upon the snail drinking from a stream, and immediately despised it as a lowly and dirty animal. To spite the snail, the deer mocked him and challenged him to a race, knowing fully well that the snail would surely lose, since the deer was the forest's fastest runner. The race would start from where they were and end in a downstream village.

"The deer of course outran the snail, and when he saw that he had a big lead over his opponent, he dropped off to rest, knowing the snail could never catch up. But the slow snail was very resourceful. He called a meeting of all the forest snails, and thousands appeared before him. They organized a relay system along the major points of the route, with each snail pretending to be the first one. The deer awoke and resumed his run, but to his surprise, no matter how many times he overtook the snail, it always seemed to be ahead of him. When he reached the finish line, to his dismay, the snail was already there.

"After the drama-fable, the performers held an open forum. The masses were asked to share their thoughts on the fable, and its probable lessons for the struggle. Very keenly, the masses grasped the lesson, one of them summing it up by saying, 'The snails are like the masses and the revolutionary organization. Even if they are still weak and small compared to the enemy, the enemy cannot overcome them. We can learn from the snails; their unity and superior organization led them to victory against the haughty deer.'"

The masses enjoyed the fable so much, Rosita said, that the story has been passed by word of mouth from barrio to barrio. Even today, the people are still talking about it.

THE IGOROT MASSES AND THE REVOLUTIONARIES

Although there are few Christian converts among the tribes in the Gran Cordillera Central, Christmas is still celebrated, but it is combined with the December 26th celebrations in the guerrilla fronts.

"The form taken by the program is mainly cultural, combined with educational discussions," said Lumbaya, a member of the Cordillera People's Democratic Front. After the opening remarks, there is a sharing of views on the significance of the occasion, the orientation and revolutionary history of the particular area, and the responses of the mass leaders.

"The celebration usually lasts until dawn. The representatives of the different communities and organizations give an *ulalim* — poetic speeches referring to the occasion. These are interspersed with the dancing of the *Pattong* and other tribal dances, as well as the rendition of old and new revolutionary songs.

"The masses show in various ways how importantly they regard the occasion. The young, who usually wear lowland

CHRISTMAS BEHIND PRISON BARS

"Our celebration of Christmas sometimes depends on camp authorities," Rino recounted. "For instance, in 1981, the custodial officer was our friend, so after the 9 p.m. headcount, the doors of each prison dormitory or building were left open until 2 a.m., and we had a big celebration. But in 1982, the doors were closed right away, and the occupants of each building had their own celebration. In both cases, the atmosphere was the same — happy.

"We share all the little things we have. Since we cannot leave the prison to go shopping, we give gifts made by our own hands — simple cards and pendants, and things that are really special and unique, like the gift I gave my wife last year — a small jewelry box inlaid with carabao bone.



Political detainees: All they want for New Year is freedom

"*Sa pagkain naman, hindi kami kinakapos.* Many concerned institutions and individuals send us food baskets, and we are able to cook and prepare our own specialties. When there are guests, however, we prepare a more formal program.

"The highlight is the reunion with our families, but the best part of this is that we consider ourselves parts of one big family. We return to the most basic meaning of Christmas: celebrating with friends and comrades as well as the family, and sharing the little we have. *Hindi makapaniwala yung ibang kinukwentuhan ko na masaya kami kahit walang bagong damit at nakabalot na regalo.* It was only last year that we had Christmas decor, a lantern, and a tree. What was always important for us was the Christmas spirit. We were very happy. *Pero syempre, ang pinakahihiling pa rin namin ay makalaya, na may magawa kaming higit na makabuluhan.*

"But all these are probably unique to Manila. In most detention centers in the provinces, it is probably very sad for other comrades, because the military are stricter. Some officers strictly enforce the red alert usually imposed during the season.

"*Ang ginagawa namin pag New Year's Eve? Wala. Nakadapa kaming lahat, dahil nagpapaputok ang mga sundalo.*"

clothes, bring their native attire out of storage and wear it proudly. They also try to outdo each other in the cultural performances. Natives from other barrios traverse an average of three mountains just to come to the celebration.

Since December is usually harvest time, there is enough food to go around. Additional resources come from natives with children working in the mines, whose cash and food gifts are in turn donated for the occasion. For the feast, the masses bring their native delicacies, like kamote or ube mixed with sugar and *malagkit*. More expensive fare like carabao beef and pork are also prepared. Sometimes, when a pig is butchered, local medicine men examine its liver to look for omens that show what is in store for the people and the revolutionary struggle. The masses also bring out the *basi* (sugarcane wine) they fermented themselves, and guests and hosts drink this from the same cups."

The celebration, however, is distinguished not so much by jating but by the presence of many people and visitors. In the Cordillera culture, every great gathering, every momentous event such as the Party anniversary, turns into a feast, a celebration.



Tribal dance: Revitalizing the colorful Kaigorotan heritage

CHRISTMAS OF HOPE FOR THE NDF NEGOTIATORS

"This is certainly a very memorable Christmas for us," said Dean Armando Malay, the father of Carolina "Bobbie" Malay-Ocampo, a member of the NDF negotiation panel. "In the past, the children would visit their father (Satur) in Bicutan and sometimes stay with him for the holidays. On other occasions, it was their mother that they spent Christmas with — surreptitiously, of course, since Bobbie was underground. But now," he continued, "Satur and Bobbie are able to spend Christmas with their children and with us."

Mrs. Paula Carolina Malay, Bobbie's mother, expressed the whole family's sentiments with calm contentment. "I'm very happy. What more can I say?" she smiled. On Christmas eve, she led relatives from her side of the family in a reunion "so that Bobbie can renew ties with her cousins and finally meet her nieces and nephews she has not yet seen before."

The Ocampo children, Silahis, 14, and Anto, 12, both looked forward to an overnight visit to Satur's hometown in Sta. Rita, Pampanga. A reunion of the large Ocampo clan (Satur has 11 brothers and sisters) was held where Silahis and Anto met dozens of cousins, uncles and aunts. Separated from their mother who left them in the care of Dean and Mrs. Malay when Satur was detained in 1976, they were too young to remember any other Christmas spent with both of their parents present.

Mrs. Charito Colet, sister of Tony Zumel, was also delighted when the ceasefire agreement was signed last Nov. 27. "Naturally, I'm very excited," she said, with a glint of tears in her eyes. "I've been waiting just for this moment. Tony can now come home — just in time for Christmas. He can now come to family reunions. He can now visit our mother. She's getting on, she's 84 now. At least, Tony will be able to see her."

But to 30-year-old Ramon, a member of the NDF security staff, a family reunion last Christmas was farthest from his mind. "Delikado pa rin ang kalagayan dahil hanggang ngayon, wala pa rin kaming safe conduct pass. Isang taon na na ring hina; nakikita ang mga magulang ko rito sa Maynila; kaya lang,



NDF panel: Anticipating a more meaningful New Year

hindi pa rin pwedeng mamasyal sa kanila o dumalo sa kastyahan nang mag-isa. Balita nga namin, may mga nahuling kasama sa Samal pagkatapos ng rally noon." After a brief pause, he joked, "Siguro, pwedeng dumalaw sa pamilya kung kasama ang negotiators, ano?"

Being detailed to the security force also meant being separated from his wife and child in the countryside. "Pero tanggap ko ito," he smiled. "Hindi talaga maiwasan ang pagkakalayo namin." Ramon, his wife and child, however, had been able to spend past Christmases with his parents. "Ipinasusundo ko sila at sa liberated area sa kanayunan kami nagpapasko. Doon, tehimik. Walang problema sa seguridad. Doon mo talaga malalaspang ang kapayapaan."

Joel, 32, another member of the security staff, spent his Christmas with comrades. Last year, he also spent the holidays in an NPA camp in the mountains with comrades, where they held a cultural presentation to celebrate the founding anniversary of the Communist Party. But Joel doesn't mind having been away from his family for the last two Christmases. "Miss na miss ko na ang mga magulang ko. Pero dapat tiisin, dahil sa ganitong kalagayan."

For Des, a 20-year-old student activist who volunteered to join the NDF staff, Christmas of 1986 was "definitely unforgettable." "For one thing, I got to meet and work with Bobbie, Satur, Tony and other NDF leaders. To student activists like me, the leadership was always so distant. Now, I have a flesh-and-blood image of what the revolutionary leadership is like. Having actually seen how they work, my trust in them has grown deeper."

For Des, she expressed the hope that, "Even if we can't resolve everything in 60 days, at least the two sides could pave the way for cooperation — banking on the sincerity of Cory Aquino and other individuals in her government. At saka, sana huwag akong madampot pagkatapos ng ceasefire."

Dean Malay's ardent wish is for Christmas of 1987 to be the same, if not better than this year's. "This first Christmas we had with Bobbie, Satur and their children will always be joyful and memorable. But by next year, I wish some of the reasonable demands of the NDF would be in place. I wish that I could see some of these changes before I die. I wish Anto and Silahis could grow into adulthood with real changes already in place."

Silahis and Anto, however, have not dared venture beyond the present 60-day preliminary ceasefire period. They have not really given thought to what might happen after the ceasefire ends on Feb. 8, 1987, preferring to enjoy what little, precious time they have with their parents now. Said Anto: "Ngayon, araw-araw ko na silang nakikita kahit hindi palaging nakakausap. At least, mas nakakahingi na ako ng tulong o advice. Tungkol sa homework, halimbawa." But Silahis has a poignant wish: "Sana nga, matuloy talaga ang peace talks para every year na lang, magkakasama kami sa Christmas." ■



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