

# LIBERATION

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State terrorism in 1988

**The dragon  
bares its fangs**

# "We wish for a liberating peace"

As the Christmas season neared, the issue of a new round of peace talks between the Aquino government and the NDF had been raised. Related to this was the proposal of certain groups to

create "zones of peace" where no armed confrontations between the NPA and the AFP should take place. Following is the NDF's statement on this issue.

The National Democratic Front joins the nation in observing the Christmas holiday, affirming its solidarity with the people in the quest for peace with justice.

This December 25, our fighting units will once again hold their fire in a gesture of goodwill, hoping to offer the nation a day of tranquility in which to enjoy the rightful spirit of the Season. Our fighting units, however, will remain vigilant, ready to defend themselves and the people against any attack by the enemy.

We deeply wish for peace to reign over our land, not just for a day or two. We wish for a durable peace that will liberate the people's energies, blessing their efforts to create new structures and processes that shall bring forth genuine national freedom and progress.

In order for that peace to come, however, the US-Aquino regime's "total war" against the masses of our



people must be defeated. Carried out through aerial bombings, ground-sea attacks and raids, forcible mass evacuations, food blockades and other acts of aggression against unarmed civilians — including little children and their grandparents — this policy is causing the wanton destruction of lives and property all over the country.

The US-Aquino regime's war against the people is an unjust war. It is just, therefore, for every conscientious citizen to oppose it. This war will certainly be defeated by the revolutionary masses struggling to achieve national democracy in the Philippines.

Conscious of the heavy sacrifices borne by the people as a result of this "total war" policy, the NDF declares its willingness to again explore with all sincerely interested parties the possibility of a comprehensive settlement of the political, economic, social and military issues underlying the armed conflict.

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Cover: "Year of the Dragon" (Painting by Andres Magbanua)

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The National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDF) serves as the organizational framework and channel for the unity, cooperation and coordination of all anti-imperialist and democratic forces in the Philippines and for progressive Filipinos and solidarity groups abroad. It traces its beginning to the establishment of the Preparatory Commission for the National Democratic Front on April 24, 1973. *LIBERATION* is the official publication of the NDF.

## COVER STORY

On today's significant issues and events

# Year of living dangerously

Heightened political repression, economic hardships mark the 12 months of 1988

Nineteen eighty-eight, the Year of the Blue Dragon, was supposed to be a year of unmitigated good luck for all. Instead, 1988 brought a storm of repression and economic hardships on a scale that brought to mind the darkest days of the Marcos dictatorship. Indeed, for many, what had come was not the Blue Dragon of good fortune, but the evil dragon of Chinese legend that even now menacingly threatens to gobble up the sun and throw the country to perpetual darkness.

Nineteen eighty-eight also tells the story of the valiant efforts of the people's organized forces, who, like the Chinese of old, rose up as one to create thunderous noises to frighten away the dragon that would eclipse the brightness of the people's revolutionary gains.

This is the year that was.

### REPRESSION ON THE RISE

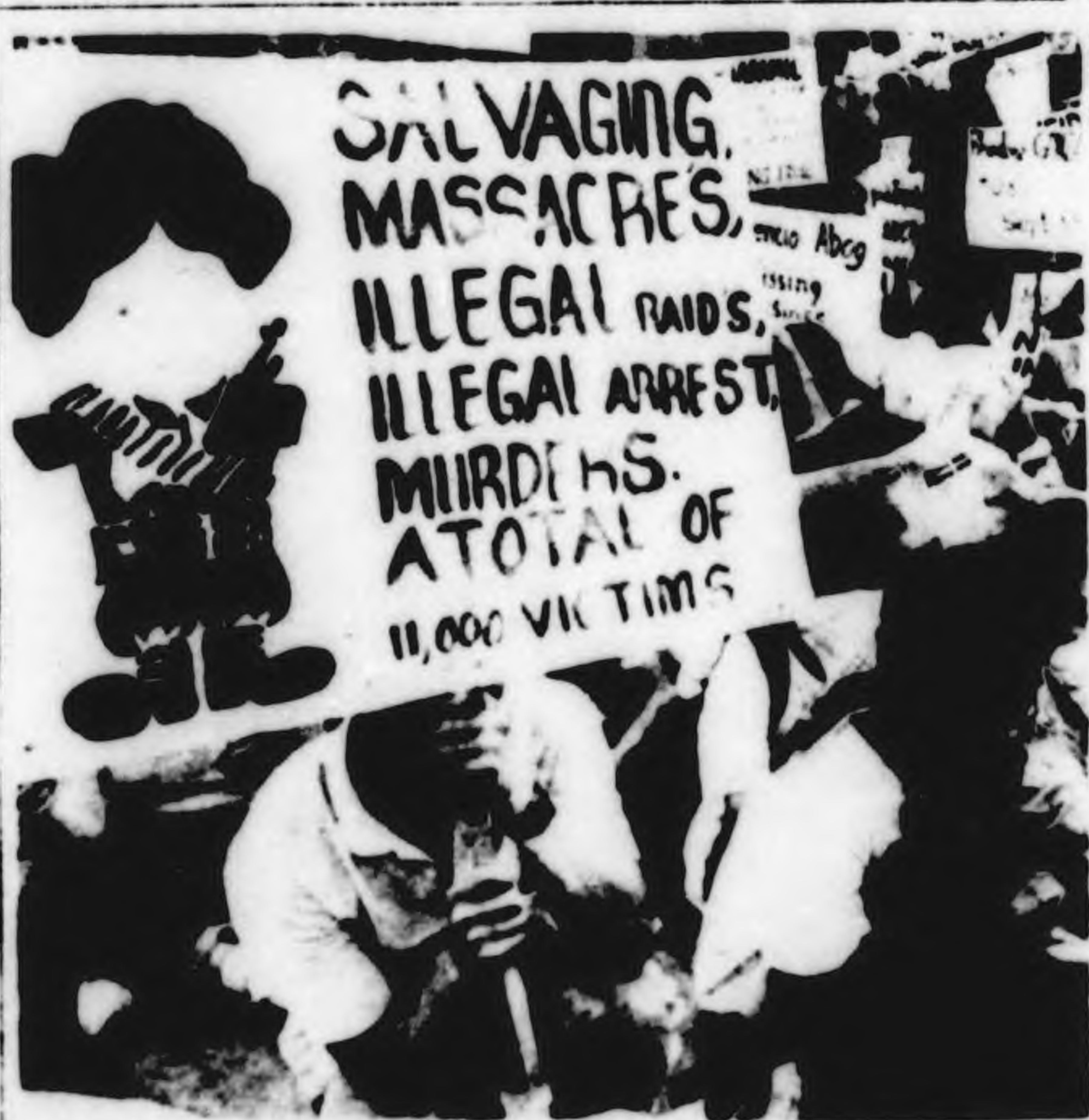
The year 1988 will be remembered as the year the US-Aquino regime shed all pretensions to liberal democratic rule by baring its fascist fangs for all to see.

In the first quarter of 1988 alone, Task Force Detainees, a human rights watchdog group, documented 2,700 cases of human rights violations, ranging from arbitrary arrests, detention without trial, torture and salvaging.

This already sordid record turned worse as the year progressed. Eighty-two people, mostly leaders and members of militant organizations, had involuntarily disappeared in the first six months of 1988. By December, the number had grown to more than a hundred. The rise in the number of *desaparecidos* was preceded by a vicious Red-baiting campaign against cause-oriented groups like the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan (BAYAN), the League of Filipino Students, the Alliance of Concerned Teachers and the GABRIELA women's alliance.

Political assassinations claimed a rising number of victims. In June, academician and human rights advocate Dr. Nemesio Prudente barely survived a second assassination attempt by an anti-communist death squad composed of vigilantes and Manila policemen. Three human rights lawyers were killed by state forces in mid-1988, while others have been victimized by death threats. In Central Luzon alone, at least four activists belonging to BAYAN, the *Katipunan ng mga Magbubukid sa Pilipinas* and the *Partido ng Bayan* were slain by military agents.

The regime's dismal human rights record has not escaped the condemnation of human rights groups abroad. In December, the New York-based Human Rights Watch reported that the Philippines has replaced Colombia as the country with the most number of documented political killings and dis-



Distinct feature of 1988: Heightened political repression

appearances in 1988.

Bombings, forced evacuations and mass arrests of civilians living in suspected NDF areas were also prevalent. In the first quarter of 1988, helicopter gunships, Tora-Tora and F-5 planes swooped down on Mabini and Tibey in Pangasinan. At least one farmer was killed, 50 arrested and 50 houses razed when troopers swept through the barrios in search of guerrillas. From late May to early July, lands inhabited by Higaonon tribespeople in Buenavista, Agusan del Norte were subjected to

daily air strikes and ground attacks as part of the military's Oplan Pyramid. In October, AFP propagandists boasted of "hundreds of NPA casualties" when military planes strafed and bombed thickly populated barrio centers in Leyte. The victims turned out to be ordinary civilians.

Apprehensive about aggressive coverage of its crimes in the international media, the AFP sought to muzzle the foreign press by accusing the British Broadcasting Company of paying the NPA in Bicol to stage an ambush last

March where a young PMA lieutenant was killed. Soon after, in an effort to cow local journalists to submission, the AFP announced that 112 media people were suspected of having links with the revolutionary forces. Finally, the National Telecommunications Commission warned broadcasters in August against airing "anti-government propaganda" in a blatant bid to curtail the people's right to be informed.

The marked rise in human rights violations has been accompanied by the rapid expansion and consolidation of the state's terror machinery. As of September, some 44,000 members of the notorious Civilian Home Defense Forces were recruited to form the core of what is essentially the same organization rechristened as the Civilian Armed Forces Geographical Units or CAFGU. The AFP planned to establish the CAFGU as an 80,000-strong paramilitary group that will conduct periodic patrols and provide intelligence information for the military. The government also sought to legitimize armed anti-communist vigilante groups, which had committed an alarming number of human rights violations, by renaming them "Bantay-Bayan" or "civilian volunteer groups." Earlier, the regime had institutionalized the AFP's Special Operations Teams, groups of soldiers charged with conducting propaganda and psychological warfare in communities suspected of being "communist-infiltrated." The creation of a national police force was also proposed, which would officially task the country's 54,000 policemen with counter-insurgency functions.

#### WORSENING ECONOMIC CRISIS

While political repression was on the rise, millions of Filipinos continued to reel from the effects of a worsening economic crisis. Estimates placed the poverty incidence at 70% of Philippine households, with the most severely affected families found in the rural areas. Surveys also showed that at least two million children of pre-school age were suffering from severe malnutrition.

About seven million, or almost one-eighth of the country's population of 54 million live in squalor in urban slums.

From 11.2% in end-1987, the 1988 unemployment rate rose to 13.4%, with over one-fourth of jobless Filipinos found in Metro Manila. By end-1988, an additional 31.7% of the country's work force was underemployed.

Those who did work received low wages that were steadily eaten up by inflation. Marginal reductions in gasoline prices, transport fares and power



Storm of protest: State terror assailed

rates failed to cushion consumers from a spiralling inflation rate, which rose from 7.61% in September to 10% in December.

Ordinary Filipinos were made to pay the price for the regime's distorted economic policies. Government technocrats boasted of a 7.5% growth rate in the Gross National Product for the first nine months of 1988. But much of the "growth" was fuelled by government pump-priming financed by heavy foreign and local borrowings. By end-1988, external debts stood at \$28.6 billion, with 44% of the national budget earmarked for debt-servicing.

The country's balance of trade deficit widened to \$922 million for the first nine months, up by 13.4% compared to the trade gap for the same period in 1987. The dollar hemorrhage resulting from heavy debt payments and imports which outstripped export earnings caused the Central Bank's foreign exchange reserves to plunge to dangerously low levels.

No new loans to boost the government's dwindling dollar reserves were forthcoming as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) objected to the Aquino regime's policy of incurring budget deficits to promote growth in the GNP. Capitulation to IMF demands is likely to result in cutbacks in government spending for social services, thus leading to the further immiseration of the poor.

Meanwhile, the public was shocked and disgusted with scandalous exposes of ill-gotten wealth and corruption perpetrated by Cory Aquino's relatives and close associates. The tragic results of bureaucratic corruption were also starkly demonstrated in October as hundreds of passengers of the sea vessel MV Dona Marilyn died when maritime authorities, after being bribed, allowed the ship to sail at the height of a strong typhoon.



Rising in anger: Fake land reform hit

#### STRIKE FEVER

Battered by the regime's harsh economic and political measures, various sectors rose in protest.

Close to 10,000 peasants and sympathizers commemorated the infamous Mendiola Massacre by marching to the Mendiola Bridge last January 22. The protesters also denounced the regime's failure to institute genuine land reform for the millions of landless peasants nationwide.

On February 24, 30,000 demonstrators rallied at the gates of Camp Aguinaldo to assail the emptiness of the promises the Aquino regime made when it assumed power two years ago in the so-called "EDSA uprising." The day after, 5,000 rallyists marched away from the government-sponsored celebration of the EDSA "revolution" and gathered at Mendiola, which had become the symbol of the regime's power and oppressiveness.

On May 1, close to 100,000 workers massed up at the Luneta in what became the biggest Labor Day rally in Philippine history. The workers not only decried the government's virtual wage-freeze policy; they also called for the dismantling of the US-Aquino regime, a move that signalled the heightened politicalization of the workers' movement.

As school opened in June, militant students launched a series of boycotts and rallies to protest a new round of tuition fee hikes, heightened campus militarization and the increased commercialization of education. Youth activists also led the campaign against

the retention of the US bases by holding almost daily marches, demonstrations, rallies and pickets, study circles and discussion groups on the issue.

Widespread teachers' strikes in Metro Manila, Central Luzon and Negros were launched in August to protest the continued non-issuance of long overdue benefits such as salary differentials and cost-of-living allowances.

The following month, nurses and other medical workers in 10 big private hospitals in Metro Manila walked out to demand payment of back wages that had been due them since 1985. The hospital strike moreover brought to the fore the sorry state of the country's health care delivery system.

In October, thousands of peasants once more took to the streets to decry the regime's sham agrarian reform program.

As if to dramatize government's gross neglect of the people's economic plight, jeepney drivers struck even as Aquino boasted of her "accomplishments" as she celebrated her 1,000th day in office. The jeepney strike, which paralyzed 85% of all transportation routes in Metro Manila last November 21, was called when Aquino ordered a 25-centavo reduction in transport fares but failed to effect decreases in the prices of vehicle spare parts and prime commodities.

Meanwhile, multisectoral coalitions continued to mount education campaigns to inform the people about the country's huge debt burden and the progressive deterioration of the state of civil liberties.

### THUNDER IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

In many rural areas, the Pambansang Katipunan ng mga Magbubukid (PKM), the revolutionary organization of the peasantry, led insurrectionary mass actions to occupy land and confiscate livestock and equipment from abusive or absentee landlords.

In Vizcaya-Quirino, more than 30 successful insurrectionary actions were staged since January, resulting in the

confiscation of hundreds of heads of cattle, swine, poultry and farm equipment. Through these actions, the peasants carried forward their agrarian revolution and shattered the economic base and political clout of Vizcaya-Quirino's most influential figures.

In one part of Negros, organized peasants confiscated some 150 hectares of abandoned sugarlands and distributed this to tillers who shifted to planting food crops rather than sugarcane. In another case of confiscation, peasants retained the sugarcane plants but collectivized land ownership in the form of cooperatives.

Thousands of poor peasants have also received titles to their land issued by the NDF or the Provisional Revolutionary Governments (PRGs) in various towns in Isabela, Vizcaya-Quirino, Cagayan and Negros.

In many other areas in the countryside, organized farmers continued to reap gains from lowered land rents and interest rates and the development of their own production, credit and marketing cooperatives.

People's democratic power continued to mushroom in guerrilla bases and zones with the NDF sectoral mass organizations providing the solid foundation. PRGs on the municipal level were established in Cagayan, Isabela, Vizcaya-Quirino and various areas in Mindanao. The PRGs established committees to take charge of various projects that would battle illiteracy, ill health, low income and productivity. Improved levels of productivity enabled the peasant masses to meet the growing needs of the people's army.

### ARMED STRUGGLE RAGES

The year 1988 witnessed the steady growth of the New People's Army and the further intensification of guerrilla warfare all over the islands.

In southern Mindanao alone, the

NPA staged about 90 military actions from January to July, netting a total of 100 high-powered rifles (HPRs).

At the Marcelo Rubber Plantation in Western Mindanao last April, guerrillas disarmed the firm's security guards and CHDF members of 31 HPRs without firing a single shot.

In Tagolo-an, Lanao del Norte last May, an NPA squad outmaneuvered an oversized platoon of the 36th IB-PA. Despite the AFP troopers' initial advantage of surprise, the Red fighters courageously fought back, killing 13 soldiers and wounding many others.

In San Antonio, Laguna last May 31, NPA guerrillas ambushed a military foot patrol, killing six soldiers and seizing six HPRs. Ten days later, an armored personnel carrier was blasted by the NPA in Cavinti, Laguna, killing three soldiers. Seized were a 50 cal. machine gun, an M60 light machine gun and more than 1,000 bullets.

On September 25 and 28, NPA offensives in Quezon netted 10 soldiers and two militiamen killed. Six troopers were captured at checkpoints set up by the guerrillas during the offensives. Earlier, the Southern Tagalog NPA had hogged the headlines with the capture of five prisoners-of-war who were held captive for 75 days. POWs were also captured during NPA tactical offensives in Ilocos, Cagayan, Vizcaya-Quirino, Negros and Mindanao. Treating POWs well and explaining to them the revolutionary cause was a way of neutralizing the troopers' capability to inflict further harm on the revolutionary forces and the people.

The NPA also successfully thwarted large-scale military campaigns in their territories. In June, NPA sabotage and harassment operations frustrated



Land title distribution in Vizcaya



KM lightning rally in Quezon City



NPA operation in Central Luzon

Oplan Pyramid in Agusan del Norte. Just this October in Isabela, Red fighters successfully blocked AFP troopers in their repeated attempts under Operation Sunflower to penetrate the province's forest regions.

The NPA's vastly improved ability to thwart major enemy campaigns and to annihilate bigger enemy forces was largely due to the systematic upgrading of the guerrilla army's skills, techniques and tactics. Through a series of trainings and conferences conducted this year, the NPA has produced Red fighters and commanders with better quality and fighting capability.

### THE NDF MARCHES ON!

To consolidate the revolutionary movement's many advances on various fronts and guide it towards a higher stage of struggle, the NDF this year came up with its new 15-Point Program. Evolving from a "program of struggle" in 1973 into a "program of governance," this latest draft discusses at length the revolutionary front's

principles of agrarian reform and national industrialization, as well as its program for social services, the protection of the environment and the conservation of natural resources. The new program also expanded previous provisions on the Moro people's struggle, autonomy for the Cordillera peoples and the economic, political and cultural liberation of Filipino women.

Different NDF sectoral mass organizations also held important gatherings in 1988. In June, the Kabataang Makabayan (KM) held its Fifth Congress, where the participants elected their officers, approved the youth organization's three-year program and a new orientation for the revolutionary youth and student movement. That same month, the National Executive Committee of the Makabayang Samahang Pangkalusugan met to firm up plans revving up the mass movement in the health sector.

In October, the Christians for National Liberation National Council convened to discuss the 1988 NDF

Draft Program and other matters.

In November, the Makabayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan (MAKIBAKA) held its Second National Congress where it affirmed its role of banner- ing women's liberation in the context of the national democratic struggle. MAKIBAKA also elected its national officers, approved its Constitution, General and Three-Year Programs, its Orientation Paper and Organizing Guide.

On November 30, the KM commemorated its 24th anniversary by staging a lightning rally in a busy intersection in Cubao, Quezon City.

Other NDF mass organizations such as the Katipunan ng mga Gurong Makabayan and the PKM continued to lead, inspire or lend direction to their respective sectors' open struggles for their rights and welfare.

The NDF's successes at year's end bannered hope for a people battered by year-long waves of political repression and a series of economic downturns. LIB Staff

## MAINSTREAM

*Developments in the people's movements*

# Riding the winds of change

MAKIBAKA affirms commitment to women's and people's liberation in Second National Congress

One stormy day last November, several women gathered somewhere in Southern Tagalog and traveled a winding, uphill dirt road that cut through the side of a small mountain. The women, who hailed from various regions in the country, came to convene the Second National Congress of the Makabayang Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan (MAKIBAKA), the national democratic revolutionary mass organization for women.

That the MAKIBAKA delegates made it through the difficult, uphill climb and forged ahead through the tempest that greeted them may as well have been symbolic. For MAKIBAKA, the way has also been long and hard, and the debates over its reason for being, stormy. But over the years, it has weathered these storms and moved forward. Said MAKIBAKA as it summed up its development since its establishment in 1971: "*Marami rin ang nagtawa at nang-insulto sa atin noon. Naging malaking usapin ang ating mithiin at direksyon. Gayunman, pinag-aralan natin ang mga ito, at patuloy tayong nag-organisa'y naglagom ng mga karanasan, lumubog at natuto sa mass, at buong tapang na sumabak sa kainitan ng rebolusyonaryong pakikibaka.*"



Breakthrough: MAKIBAKA rises anew from the ranks of women revolutionaries

In its first year of existence as a legal organization, MAKIBAKA had up to 200 members from various high schools and colleges throughout the country. During this period, MAKIBAKA was best remembered for picketing the Binibining Pilipinas Beauty Pageant and the Awarding Ceremonies for Manila's Best-Dressed Women.

These protest actions invited a variety of reactions, ranging from support to ridicule. But they nonetheless brought to the public's attention the existence of the fledgling women's organization and the cause it bannered: the struggle for the liberation of Filipino women within the context of the national democratic revolution.

Despite numerous difficulties, MAKIBAKA persevered in this endeavor. In 1972, it was able to expand to other regions, establish its own cultural group *Silayan*, and compose its own anthem entitled "Awit ng MAKIBAKA." From March 18 to 19 of that year, MAKIBAKA held its First National Congress attended by about 50 delegates from chapters all over the country. In this gathering, MAKIBAKA reaffirmed its orientation and resolved to expand its membership nationwide and recruit more women from the peasantry and the working class.

Driven underground five months later with the declaration of martial law, MAKIBAKA joined other revolutionary organizations in resisting the fascist dictatorship. MAKIBAKA members were among the hundreds of students who launched a lightning rally at the University of the Philippines in Diliman on September 23, 1972, hours after martial law was declared.

MAKIBAKA continued organizing cells in schools, factories, offices and communities amid worsening conditions of fascist rule. In 1974, it issued a statement condemning the Miss Universe Pageant held in Manila, a P10-million extravaganza that exploited women to divert the people's attention from their grinding poverty.

With the intense repression of martial law, however, more and more MAKIBAKA members trekked to the countryside to join the NPA and help organize the peasant mass base for the armed struggle. Others who stayed in the cities organized workers and urban poor communities and undertook other tasks in the revolutionary underground. Not a few were captured, brutally tortured and killed by the fascist regime. By 1975, MAKIBAKA members decided to suspend their organization's activities to concentrate on the urgent task of stepping up the people's war against the US-Marcos dictatorship.

But wherever they were assigned and in whatever arena of struggle they entered, the women of MAKIBAKA carried with them the same consciousness that spurred them to establish their organization in 1971. The seeds of this consciousness were in turn sown in the hearts and minds of thousands of other women revolutionaries who have taken the first step towards their liberation by daring to break the traditional belief that women should merely be confined to the home.

Thirteen years later, during MAKIBAKA's Second National Congress, the greetings that poured in from other revolutionary organizations like



Peasant women: Backbone of MAKIBAKA's membership

the NDF, the Women Workers' Committee of the CPP, the *Kabataang Makabayan*, the Alex Boncayao Brigade and the *Artista at Manunulat ng Sambayanan* paid tribute to the invaluable contributions of women to the revolutionary struggle especially during the dark days of dictatorship.

The road to MAKIBAKA's Second National Congress began in the early '80s, when the need to once more form an organization that shall banner the cause of women's liberation and organize the broadest numbers of women for the national democratic revolution became apparent. At this time, women in their thousands had begun to join the surging anti-dictatorship struggle. The time had come for MAKIBAKA to once again rise from the swelling ranks of women militants and revolutionaries.

Since then, the old MAKIBAKA members, as well as new adherents to the cause, have been establishing cells and chapters nationwide among various sectors of women. MAKIBAKA's Second Congress thus sought to unify the efforts of these MAKIBAKA cadres and activists all over the country and establish once more the organization's national center, which was dismantled during martial law.

In the organization's Program of Action which was approved during its Second Congress, MAKIBAKA's main thrusts are to strengthen its existing network, establish more cells and chapters nationwide, especially among women workers and peasants and to propagate the MAKIBAKA Orientation among all NDF mass organizations and the broad masses of Filipino women. MAKIBAKA resolved as well to propagate the agenda of national democracy among all its members. The organization also elected its national officers who will serve a three-year term. Chosen were Silvia Madiaga, chairperson; Dalisay Magbanua, vice chairperson; and Sayi Malaya, secre-

tary-general.

In its Second Congress, MAKIBAKA once again harkened back to the principles which formed the bases for its establishment in 1971. In the basic documents that were discussed and approved during the Congress, MAKIBAKA asserted that Filipino women experience oppression and exploitation on three levels: as part of the Filipino nation, they suffer the scourge of US imperialism; as part of the oppressed and exploited classes, they are deprived of the fruits of their labor by greedy capitalists and landlords; and as women, they suffer the added and distinct oppression of being discriminated against economically, politically and culturally.

MAKIBAKA believes that Filipino women cannot work for their total liberation unless the Filipino nation is first liberated from the clutches of US imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism. Thus, women have a big stake in the victory of the national democratic revolution that shall stamp out these basic ills. Said MAKIBAKA: "*Tanging ang rebolusyong ito ang magbubunsod ng mga kalagayan at kongkretong kundisyon tungo sa ganap na paglaya ng kababaihan.*" However, MAKIBAKA emphasized that the struggle for women's liberation does not stop with the attainment of national democracy. Thus, its members have pledged to continue the struggle for as long as the reality of women's oppression exists: "*Ipagpapatuloy namin ang pakikibaka ng kababaihang Pilipino hanggang sa tagumpay at aalpasan namin ang mga balakid at sagabal sa aming pagkilos.*"

For too long, the road to the Filipino women's liberation has been a storm-whipped, rocky, uphill climb. But with MAKIBAKA once again in the eye of the tempest, the plodding, uphill climb shall someday give way to surging columns of women riding the stormy winds of change.

Victoria Manalo

# Raling iglap!

KM stages lightning rally to celebrate 24th anniversary



Vibrant sight: Youth activists create a stir in downtown Cubao

November 30, National Heroes' Day, was a non-working holiday. The Cubao crowd at noon that day was composed of the usual hawkers, window-shoppers and passersby. At the busy intersection near EDSA, jeepneys

plying their usual routes, clogged traffic with drivers switching lanes and jockeying for more passengers. The traffic policeman and his aide, waving and whistling frantically, were, as usual, trying to instill some order on

the flow of vehicles and jaywalkers. But something unusual was astir in the depths of that bustling, holiday crowd.

At the sound of a signal, some 200 youths whose faces were half-hidden behind handkerchiefs suddenly emerged from the crowd and assembled at the center of the street. Closing ranks, they started to march, chanting "Rebolusyon, Rebolusyon!" Red banners emblazoned with "Kabataan, Lumahok sa Digmang Bayan," "Mabuhay ang NPA!" and the Old Tagalog script for "K" at the center of a large triangle, simultaneously appeared, waving in the wind.

The *raling iglap*, or "lightning rally," was launched to commemorate the 24th founding anniversary of the Kabataang Makabayan (KM), the national democratic revolutionary organization for the youth and students. The ancient letter "K" inscribed within the triangle was the KM's official logo.

The youths marched for several minutes more before disappearing once again in the dense holiday crowd. The "lightning rally" was over almost as suddenly as it had begun. Said a cigarette vendor who witnessed the event, "Okey, a. Ang tatapang nila!"

## "Living forever in our people's memories"

What it's like to grow old gracefully in the service of the revolution

"Parag-uma kami (we are of peasant stock)," they said, "and peasants never grow old, they just fade away."

Except for some strands of greying hair and wrinkles on their sturdy brown faces, Inday, 42; Basilio, 44; Nonoy, 56; Igne, 54; Poldo, 50; and Maning, 42 could indeed be anything but old. All of them come from peasant families who have tilled the land for generations. Now, the six of them have come to be at the core of some 11,000 fulltime and part-time Pambansang Katipunan ng mga Magbubukid (PKM) activists, Communist Party cadres and members, and people's militia in 15 barrios in the southern district of Samar. They are the NDF's best cadres in the area.

Being over 40 does not seem to bother Ka Inday, the only woman in the group. "We used to be rich peasants in our village by the bay," she recounted. "When comrades from the city came to organize our place in 1973, we were the first to join. These comrades frequented our house and sometimes stayed for weeks. From them we learned of the brewing revolution against the US-Marcos dictatorship. I was assigned to arouse, organize and mobilize the women in our village, and eventually in other neighboring vil-



White-haired cadre: Age doesn't matter

lages."

"The women and other barriofolk welcomed us warmly," she continued. "Entire villages joined up, including fishing communities. When the enemy got wind of our organizing activities, we were forced to move on. But the seeds of the revolution had already been sown. Local leaders had sprouted

and even when the enemy was constantly around, the people continued to support us."

"My husband and I have been organizing peasant, women's and youth associations all our adult lives," she proudly said. "Now, one of our two sons has come of age and at 16, is already a trained fulltime paramedic. My only reservation is that I only finished grade school and I feel handicapped by the lack of proper training in theory now that I have been assigned to a leading committee," she said.

All the others share, aside from receding hairlines, almost identical experiences: they started organizing their own villages and then went on to other far-flung barrios, profoundly touching the simple peasant lives of hundreds of *kaingeros* and their families, and seemed not to mind the years catching up on them.

Ka Nonoy, a former barrio captain, is a judo expert and has the gift of gab. He ran his small village with brawn and brains. But he was always fair. He did not believe in taking advantage of the weak and despised those who did. That is why, he said, when the first Sandatahang Yunit Pampropaganda (SYP) of the New People's Army arrived in his barrio, he



was the first to welcome the team.

He had beforehand heard of fabulous tales of valor and chivalry about the *hukbo* and he had wanted to meet and learn from them. When finally they came, he treated the three-man SYP to a meal of roasted chicken in his *payag* (nipa hut) and listened to their endless political small talk.

He eventually became leader of the first NPA unit organized in their area. He led his ragtag squad armed mostly with carbines and *pugakhang* (homemade shotguns) in several successful ambushes, numerous skirmishes and victorious defensive actions against the better-armed and -trained enemy. When his knees began to trouble him, he willingly accepted the transfer to local organizing work and soon teamed up with Ka Inday and the others.

"I hope the country will already be liberated when I retire so I could avail of my retirement benefits," he grinned mischievously. "But first, I have to somehow overcome this habit of forgetting to clean my Colt .45 pistol regularly."

Ka Basilio, smiling as always, glanced at the glib Ka Nonoy and started to say something. But he thought better and instead made his next move on the *dama* board he was playing with Ka Igne. Ka Basilio had been thinking of his youngest child who, he just learned from a letter his wife had written three days ago, was down with broncho-pneumonia. His wife, with the assistance of the barrio peasant association, had managed to solicit P100 for her child's immediate medical needs. But it was far from enough for she needed about P500. So she had decided to write her husband about the dilemma.

On learning of the situation, Ka Basilio's collective immediately dispatched P700 by direct courier and suggested to have the child brought to the city hospital, since the ailment could not be treated with only paramedics around.

Ka Basilio was sure the peasant association would do its best to have his child taken care of, but it was the admixture of fatherly longing that continually bothered him that day, especially since it was nearing Christmas. He had not seen his family for almost three months now and he somehow felt a tinge of guilt for his child's sickness. Yet, he thought, he had been in exactly the same situation before. He had even lost a child while he was away. He finally decided to consult his comrades about his feelings.

Should he go now to personally oversee his child's hospitalization and leave his tasks until he could come back? Is it right to leave behind an im-



*Elderly organizer and son: Continuing the struggle of generations*

portant political task for such a purely personal matter? After some thoughtful deliberations and sharing of experiences, the collective decided to grant Ka Basilio a week's leave of absence and admonished him to seek financial assistance from well-to-do relatives to augment the meager allowance the collective had sent. But at the last moment, Ka Basilio himself decided to forego his leave till after he had finished documenting the draft on the assessment of organizational matters that had been assigned to him. Then, he promised to be back in time for the final deliberations on his draft report.

Resolving his own personal problem that way made Ka Basilio feel light and confident. He neither felt slighted over his collective's delving into his private affairs nor did he feel ashamed of himself for his collective's being so considerate in permitting him to go. He had always consulted his collective. Experience has taught him that the collective decision made things clearer and easier especially on important matters both personal and political, such as this. He had learned that relying on the collective did not hamper his personal choices. In fact, he admits, it enhances one's capacity to weigh out things judiciously and thus enjoin the individual to give and do his best for his job.

Ka Igne nodded his approval as Ka Poldo and Ka Maning almost simultaneously wondered aloud how aging comrades like them could still be of most service to the people in such difficult times. When Cory Aquino came to power, they thought things would somehow go easy for them.

"We entertained ideas like holding responsible positions in the barrio revolutionary committees so we could avoid being too mobile, which is very hard on our bones," they confessed. "But now, it is clear that the new government only wants to annihilate us and continue in the old ways of tyranny against the people. We have no

other choice but to go on with the struggle. Only, we have to contend with an added nemesis: old age."

The group recognized the practical problems brought by old age. It is a biological phenomenon which no one can avoid, not even a peasant, whose physique is hardened by years of toil. If they do not seem to age, it is because of necessity. "Even if we were ordinary farmers like we used to be, getting old wouldn't have come between us and our land. It is the same now that we are farmers cultivating revolution in the hearts and minds of our people," Ka Inday extemporized.

They plan to place the question of old age on their agenda. Presently, it is treated on a case-to-case basis. As in the case of Ka Nonoy, when he started to show signs of physical weariness because he was getting old in the *hukbo*, the NPA's higher command recommended that he be assigned to a less physically strenuous job in the locality. But only while he was still strong enough to carry on other revolutionary tasks.

How about when he finally succumbs to nature and must take respite from the rigors of revolutionary life? Will he be guaranteed the "retirement benefits" now even before liberation? These questions have been duly considered in their group, Ka Basilio replied. But no final decision has been reached for now. "Maybe when one of us really has to retire already," added Ka Nonoy.

Meanwhile, they have to fight against recurring forgetfulness, "getting soft" on their emotional attachment to family and place of origin, simple *rayuma* and weakening physical strength, in order to carry on with the revolution. "On the other hand," Ka Inday said, "growing old gracefully in the service of the revolution and the people could actually be a blessing in disguise. For we shall have lived eternally in the hearts and minds of our future generations." *Tara Go-Mies*

# Days of pain, days of glory

Veteran guerrilla recounts suppression and encirclement campaign in Isabela in the '70s

*In the annals of the revolutionary movement, Isabela is recalled for the Long March, the valiant resistance put up by no more than 200 cadres and Red fighters against unrelenting attack and pursuit by 15,000 enemy troops from 1972 to 1975. The Long March also refers to the heroic efforts of Isabela's 200, and later, Cagayan Valley's 500 guerrillas and some 2,000 mass activists to expand revolutionary influence all over Northern Luzon.*

*The odds were overwhelming: the pioneer revolutionaries were battered by at least eight major encirclement and suppression campaigns within the first decade of the revolutionary movement, and by starvation and disease in a harsh forest region emptied by the forced evacuation and hamletting of some 50,000 people during the period. But today, the legacy of the Isabela veterans is felt all over Northern Luzon, where the most rapid advances in the revolutionary movement in the past two years, have been taking place.*

*This December, as we celebrate the 20th year of the national democratic movement, we recall the martyrdom of the hundreds who perished in battle, or of hunger and disease, in the Long March. Of the 200 who were forced to retreat from the forest regions of Isabela in 1972, no more than 10 have survived to this day. One of them, Ka Dan, was interviewed by LIB. This is his story.*

In 1972, Cagayan Valley in Northern Luzon was the most important physical base of the revolutionary forces. Although its wild terrain is crisscrossed by angry rivers and countless rivulets, all the requisites for a vigorous advance of the people's war were present. Even then, some half a million people — spread out in Isabela, Nueva Vizcaya, Cagayan, the Mountain Province and the Ilocos provinces — effectively supported the revolutionary movement. Indeed, Cagayan Valley then was home to the largest mass base of the revolutionary forces, with governing revolutionary committees existing in hundreds of barrios and over 200 people's militia supporting the rapidly growing New People's Army.

This strategic role of Cagayan Valley was not lost on the enemy. In early 1971, soldiers of the deposed dictator Ferdinand Marcos captured a leader of the NPA and snatched from him documents detailing the large concentration of Red fighters in Cagayan Valley, including the use, for a time, of Isabela's forest regions as headquarters of the national leadership and later, the

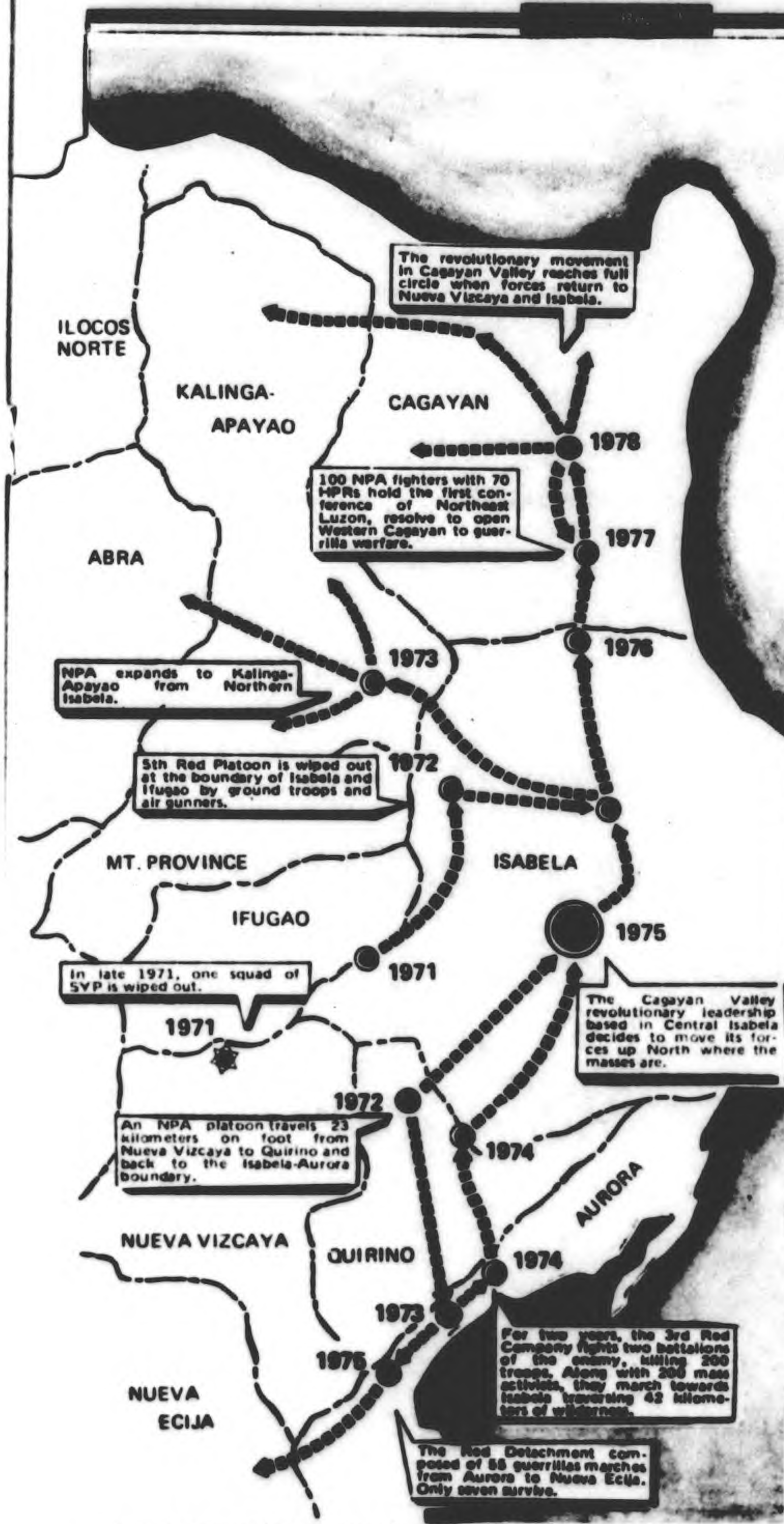


regional leadership. Marcos also invited Faustino Dy, then a mayor who was friendly to the revolutionary movement, to Malacanang to propose what seemed like an irresistible offer. When Dy returned to Isabela in late 1971, he had made a sudden turnaround by pointing out where the barrio revolutionary committees and the areas of the NPA were. Shortly thereafter, the AFP began its long, vicious campaign across Nueva Vizcaya and Isabela.

In April 1972, a platoon of Red fighters was forced to move out of Nueva Vizcaya towards Quirino province, travelling 65 kilometers of harsh terrain. This same platoon travelled 58 kilometers on foot until 1974, from Quirino back to the Isabela-Aurora boundary.

A few months later, the 4th Red Platoon that was based in Western Isabela, was pursued by a battalion of enemy troops to the dry plains of Tabacal and Mallig where they lacked forest cover. In September 1973, the 5th Red Platoon at the boundary of Isabela and Ifugao was wiped out by a full concentration of enemy troops, backed by firepower and air gunners.

"We used to wake up at four, take our breakfast and our bath and set out at six," recalled Ka Dan. He was 19 at



the time, a fresh recruit from a university in Manila. "We used to pause briefly at noon to take our lunch, then walk again until eight in the evening. We carried everything on our backs - kilos of rice, pots and pans."

For two years, from 1974 to 1975, the 3rd Red Company based in Aurora province fought two battalions of the enemy - the 25th PC Ranger Battalion and the 20th IB. Although 200 AFP troops were killed in the continuing battle and 100 high-powered arms were seized from the enemy, the Aurora Company was forced to retreat. Along with 200 mass activists, the 3rd Red Company marched towards Isabela, traversing 42 kilometers of wilderness.

Meanwhile, the 5th Red Detachment composed of 55 guerrillas, set out for Nueva Ecija in late 1975. The 135-kilometer long march - marked with pitch battles, hunger and malaria attacks - proved too much for the 5th RD. By 1977, only seven had survived. Over in Aurora, 100 mass activists who remained in the province were massacred, tortured and maimed.

The AFP's target was never limited to the NPA. In fact, its most vicious attacks were directed against what it called "civilian sympathizers." Tens of thousands of these people were herded out of the forest regions of Isabela beginning 1972. Most of them were brought to the town centers at the other side of the deep and dangerous Cagayan river, where they were hamletted and their settlements surrounded with scores of enemy detachments and outposts.

"For the comrades to get to the masses at the other side of the river was like asking a camel to go through a needle's eye," wrote chronicler Ruth Firmeza, who survived the March.

For Dan, 1972 to 1975 was the "period of hunger." "The masses were out of reach, but most of them had left their palay harvest in the granaries. That meant we had food, as long as we had time and were willing to pestle the grain. But even that did not last because there were too many of us. So the next thing we did was to gather root crops."

"The root crops soon ran out, so we tried eating unripe bananas - *saba*, *lakatan* and *latundan*, in that order. When the fields became bushy because they were uncultivated, we competed with the wild pigs for food.

"When bananas ran out, we tried all kinds of leaves and seeds. *Malunggay* was very, very bitter when we did not have salt or bagoong for seasoning.

"Have you ever tried eating roasted rattan? We had that for breakfast, lunch and dinner, aside from the trunk

Strewn with hardship: Routes taken by Isabela veterans

of banana trees, chopped and boiled."

Battle-weary and hungry, Dan said, the resistance of the Red fighters to malaria dropped and the attacks became more frequent. "The enemy began to caricature the NPA in their posters as skinny, potbellied men because that was what we were," said Dan.

Cerebral malaria, the most vicious and fatal kind, downed a squad of NPA that travelled with Dan. It afflicted Ruth, who once admitted to

called Fifth Campaign had killed 40 cadres and Red fighters. Many barrios had also been lost to the enemy.

Shortly after, however, many members of the revolutionary leadership were captured in Manila.

"Our morale was totally shattered after that. To lift our spirits, we wrote songs and reproduced handwritten copies of these because we did not have mimeographing machines," said Dan.

By late 1976, 100 NPA fighters

Within the same year, two AFP battalions launched Operation Tagaraw in Gattaran and Cabuggao, Cagayan and Oplan Aurora Borealis in October 1978. The Nip in the Bud Operation was launched next in 1981 to wipe out the revolutionary forces in eastern Cagayan, followed by Operation Stardust in 1981. Finally, Oplan Katatagan was launched in 1982 and Oplan Red Buster, till 1988.

But instead of being decimated, it was within this period that the revolutionary movement was able to spread northward to Apayao and Ilocos. In 1979, the NPA in Cagayan doubled its firepower and membership, and in the last quarter of 1978, the revolutionary forces were able to penetrate western Cagayan. In 1985, the revolutionary movement in the Cagayan Valley reached full circle when forces from Cagayan returned to Nueva Vizcaya and Isabela to cultivate once more the struggle that had been stalled for a number of years.

All in all, 300 cadres and Red fighters were killed, and more mass activists perished in the Long March that covered 370 kilometers of wild terrain and eight major battles from 1969 to 1979. But the memory of their heroism and sacrifices is alive in the hearts of those who today, carry on their glorious legacy. **Pen Guerrero**

“Three hundred cadres and Red fighters were killed and more mass activists perished in the Long March that covered 370 kilometers of wild terrain and eight major battles from 1969 to 1979.”

"losing his head for a while."

The worst part of the ordeal, said Dan, was that for two years, from 1974 to 1975, the fighters in the region had no communication with the national leadership. "We were lost and we were alone." When finally, they established contact, they were advised to retreat from Isabela.

Thus, in 1976, the leadership in Northern Luzon began the northward retreat from Isabela to Cagayan. It was a timely decision. For by then, the so-

with 70 high-powered rifles had reached Baggao in southeastern Cagayan. The First Conference of Northeast Luzon was convened to take stock of the situation and chart the future.

Once the revolutionary forces reached Cagayan, however, the AFP launched more vicious attacks, one after another. Task Force Rebel Hunter in March 1977 forced the evacuation of 25 barrios in Baggao and resulted in the killing of peasants and the burning of at least 20 houses.

# Cradle of the revolution

NPA in Isabela recovers lost ground, achieves dramatic advances in armed struggle

*"Walang mahirap sa daigdig na ito  
Kung ating pangangahasan  
Na akyatin ang kataas-taasan  
Sisirin ang kalaliman."*

When the New People's Army (NPA) returned to Isabela in 1986 and began to rebuild what was once the biggest guerrilla base in the countryside, it showed little of the difficulties it had weathered years before. Instead, it broke all existing records of growth in the history of the NPA.

In 1987 alone, the NPA membership in Isabela increased by 50%. Within 12 months, the Red fighters launched 95 tactical offensives, which netted 220 high-powered firearms and 65 pistols, resulting in a 100% increase in firepower. These military offensives were initiated in 33 of Isabela's 37 towns. With these operations, the NPA has caused the surrender of, or dismantled two companies of CHDF in three towns, and neutralized many more detachments of the enemy in other areas.

From April to August of 1988, the NPA launched a military campaign



Isabela guerrillas in foxhole: Toughened by years of struggle

which involved two regular companies, and many other territorial units and militia forces. With the leadership of the Dr. Juan Escandor Operational Command, the NPA initiated eight major tactical offensives in nine municipalities. These included the

►raid at the town halls of Mallig and Ramon in May;

►raid at the camp of the CAFGU and the 4th Scout Rangers Btln, Delta Coy in San Agustin in April;

►raid on a camp of a regular platoon of the 21st IB in Palanan, which wiped

out troops and destroyed the camp;

►raid on detachments of the PC-INP in Enrile, Cagayan and Paracelis in Ifugao;

►ambush of an AFP convoy in Jones and then a raid at the Jones town hall in August;

►ambush and destruction of one armored personnel carrier in Tabuk, Kalunga-Apayao in July; and the

►capture of newly-retired National Intelligence Coordinating Agency chief in the Cagayan Valley, former Col. Egor Cepeda in July.

These victories signalled a new stage in the development of the armed struggle in Isabela. For example, these operations indicated the NPA's capacity to initiate military campaigns of up to three months under a central command. The operations also showed the NPA's capacity to wipe out regular platoons of the enemy and neutralize or frustrate regular operations of the AFP. Most significantly, the offensives indicated an improved capability on the part of the NPA and the masses to defend the guerrilla zones in the mountain regions.

When a battalion of the AFP sought to drive the revolutionary forces out of Isabela's forest regions in September to October this year, they did not find the poorly-trained pot-bellied guerrillas of the old days.

Dispersed into groups of thirties, the notorious 41st IB from Cagayan marched towards 10 barrios of the forest region on September 9. Their objective: to launch Operation Sunflower by attacking the NPA training ground in the forest region.

On September 10, an enemy platoon tried to penetrate the Old Nursery, a crucial entry point towards the forests, but was quickly repulsed by seven members of the *milisyang bayan*. Three soldiers and one civilian were killed in the clash.

A week later, a platoon of NPA guerrillas blocked 76 soldiers from Kabuluan, another entry point, and killed three of them. Two days later, on September 18, desperate AFP troopers made another try for the Old Nursery, this time boosted by a helicopter gunship. Again, an agile NPA squad aimed at the heligunship from the bushes, killing its gunner and wounding its pilot.

Finally, on September 20, 40 AFP troopers found an abandoned training camp in the forest region. This was immediately announced by the newspapers, despite the fact that only one guerrilla was killed in the assault, an Aggay tribesman who refused to concede the camp and who killed one soldier before he himself was gunned down.

On October 4, the NPA retaliated by raiding a military camp under construction inside a logging concessionaire's compound near the town of San Jose. There were no casualties on either side, but the Red fighters successfully drove off with a brand-new bulldozer worth P8 million.

#### Battle of Ambabok Hill

Eleven days later, however, there raged the most difficult battle under Operation Sunflower.

On October 15, 40 enemy troopers entered the barrio of Ambabok in the

forested areas. Before sunset, they had seized the foxholes from the peasants who made them for the NPA atop Ambabok Hill, a tiny elevation similar to Vietnam's Hamburger Hill.

This time, however, the Red fighters were at a disadvantageous position. They were at the foot and had to crawl up the hill to drive away the enemy.

By 5 PM, when the entire barrio had been evacuated, 80 Red fighters began the quiet ascent up Ambabok Hill. Midway through, the guerrillas commenced their fire. The soldiers countered with rifle grenades and M79s, mortar shells, machine guns and M14s at them.

"For 24 hours, the sky was red from the flash of exploding grenades. They did not run out of ammunition," said Intay, a peasant woman who witnessed the battle. Still, with skillful maneuver by the guerrillas, most of whom were new recruits, the enemy troops were soon forced out of their advantageous position uphill.



New recruit: Inheriting a glorious legacy

The guerrillas assaulted the hill for 24 hours, pushing the beleaguered soldiers towards a cliff. It was almost sunset when the soldiers scampered out of Ambabok towards the river. There, at the height of typhoon Toyang, the swollen waves battered and drowned those who survived Ambabok. Only 13 of the 40 troopers finally made their way back to their camp, according to AFP radio reports monitored by the NPA. Six of them lost their rifles while crossing the swollen river.

"Our only regret was that we were not able to get some firearms. Apparently, the soldiers buried them near the river bank," recalled Intay. "But our loss was theirs too. I doubt if they could ever find their rifles again."

#### The 21st IB retreat

Two weeks later, the military tried to cover up their loss at Ambabok by launching another operation.

On October 24, AFP helicopters spotted a training ground where hundreds of guerrillas were encamped. About two groups of AFP troops tried to cross a river for the third time in a

month, towards the Old Nursery. Again, five members of the *milisyang bayan* sniped at the invading troops, killing five of them while they struggled across the river.

Annoyed at the enemy's persistence, the NPA commanding officer ordered his men to take up ambush positions along all entry points. There were only 57 Red fighters for the ambush while the enemy was believed to be made up of 80 troopers. Clearly, the NPA did not have enough fighters. To ensure victory, NPA guerrillas double or triple their men against one enemy soldier. "We've got to finish this once and for all," he roared to his men. "They are becoming a nuisance."

On October 29, four days into waiting for the ambush, eating, bathing and washing clothes in the same place, the NPA saw their chance when the enemy finally walked into the designated fire zone.

The impatient guerrillas wasted no time. Seven AFP troopers were killed in the first volley. The enemy retreated in panic. Only one Red fighter was wounded.

On All Saint's Day, however, the AFP troops planned their own ambush. Some 70 NPA guerrillas were stationed in barrio Kabulwan, not knowing that 77 soldiers had identified their position and were ready to attack with rifle grenades and bazookas.

Early in the morning, Ka Bobby, a sprightly Aggay warrior, marched to his post around the barrio. Shortly before 7 AM, he saw the army soldiers guarding a prisoner. "My first impulse was to shoot," he said later. Indeed, Ka Bobby sniped at three soldiers on patrol.

The death of their three comrades by an unseen sniper rattled the soldiers. They panicked, and gave their prisoner, whom they had been keeping for a week, a chance to escape. The prisoner, an NPA courier they had intercepted, crawled his way to freedom and gave the guerrillas the intelligence data they needed.

Now, it was the NPA's turn to place themselves in ambush positions against the approaching enemy. They sealed all exit points and for two days waited for the soldiers to pass.

But the enemy never showed up, certain that the escaped prisoner had tipped off their strength, position, and plans. There was only one exit left, and that was the deadly river.

Once again, by frustrating Operation Sunflower, the New People's Army knew they had reclaimed Isabela. After a decade, they had returned to the land that cradled, and now bears witness to the revolution's rapid growth. ■

# Revolution as an act of love

Review of *Clearing*, 1987, 92 pp.



*When I miss your presence  
And love must traverse highways  
And courage climb mountains,  
I conduct the ritual of a poem.*  
— "Ritual"

Among others, the single theme most prominent and most preponderant in Jason Montana's anthology of poems, *Clearing* (published by the Artista at Manunulat ng Sambayanan, 1987), is, not surprisingly, love. In fact, he sees revolution as the ultimate act of love. The various ways in which the revolutionary can love — love the masses, love one's partner, love the God manifest in the people's struggles — are part and parcel, co-extant and co-operant with his being a revolutionary.

Through all of the poems, this revolutionary spirit is present and unflagging, serving as inspiration, motivation and guiding light. Jason Montana did well not to indulge in a style reminiscent of sloganeering — his are observations of life taken in the light of people thought and expressed in verse.

The first four poems ("Homecoming: The Language, The Church, Breaking the Circle, and The Graves") serve as apt beginning. We are introduced to the poet on a homecoming trip to bury the dead, a loved one. We see the town as he sees it and feel as he feels:

*.... There is an end to breathing time,  
Then a lowering into a pool of tears....*  
— "Homecoming: The Graves"

From them we go through the matrix of his life through the various celebrations, actions, contemplations,

events, circumstances and people that surround, and fill everyone's life, but as seen through the eyes of a dedicated freedom fighter. For example, two poems dwell on the theme of Christmas: "Prophecy" and "Cordillera Christmas," the latter being especially indelible in its contrasts of images; there is also an excellent ode to Baguio City:

*City of a hundred hills  
How still in the night it lies....  
Tonight there is a secret meeting  
Of workers on Holy Ghost hill....*  
— "Nocturne in Baguio City"

There is a spirit of piety in Jason's poems; references to the God of history are everywhere, as in the poems "Easter Homily" and "Jonas Outside a Country Church," or the Christmas poems.

Then there are the poems which describe guerrilla life such as in the touching, evocative, emphatic "Zone Encounter." Feel the following lines:

*...New names are introduced. All are received.  
As beloved warriors in the common struggle,  
Each bearing the living presences of comrades  
Of other places, other times.  
Slowly the house becomes a full grenade....*  
— "Zone Encounter"

Then there are times when prose becomes poetry as in "Barrio Hapao: Summing Up."

*The cadre must not miss this time of coals,  
And the masses, the discovery that we can  
Sum up the fissive sparks from the forge  
And the workers' hammering, to correspond  
To the welded beauty of the hammer and sickle.*

Personal, political, physical love are also expressed in poems like "Orange Orchids," "So Must Love Become," "Time Turns for Us," "Love Beginning" and others but always in the correct situationer of a much bigger love — the love for the people.

*.... No longer are we so bourgeois  
As to be voyagers hurled into black holes of idealism....  
And where else can we feel so close to each other  
And grow on the tensions of personal love  
And the call to give all to the people's struggle....*  
— "Orange Orchids"

Heart-warming are the poems on Jason's first-born as:

*You lay in your crib, a total presence  
Unexpected beyond imagination  
of love....*

— "I Was Speechless  
When I First Saw You"

The Cordillera poems, poems which depict the struggle and the peoples of this great mountain range make up one substantial unit in this collection. Notable among them are the thought-provoking "Cordillera Harvest," the celebratory "Ifugao Revisited" and the most notable poems of the lot: "Turning Point" and "Celebration." "Turning Point" is a particular achievement. It first describes a tribal people on the warpath, their traditions, their enemies. As the village comes into contact with the revolutionary movement, tribal anger is transformed into class anger so that divisive tribal wars are elevated to the more meaningful revolutionary guerrilla warfare. This breaking of the chains, so to speak, liberates not only the tribespeople from the traditions of old that bind them. It also liberates the women of the tribe from the chauvinistic attitudes that oppress them, raising them to their rightful status of being co-equal to men:

*....worthy and capable is woman  
To bear arms against the class enemies  
Of an oppressed and exploited people.  
She who works the rice fields,  
She who gives life must defend life....*  
— "Turning Point"

What does all this say? That the revolution can nurture love and poetry. That poetry is not the sole property of the privileged and the elite. That there is culture in the hills — indeed, a new kind of culture. It is a culture that serves the people and educates them at the same time. It is growing along with the revolution that spawned it and it will one day soon digest the Coca Cola culture the enemies of the people impose on us.

Jason Montana, fittingly enough, ends *Clearing* with elegies: tributes to the fallen heroes and martyrs of the revolution like Puri Pedro, Edgar Jopson, Fr. Zacarias Agatep. As he says in "In Memoriam?":

*Death shall have no dominion  
The people release you from  
its shackles  
And hold you in being in their hearts  
Fallen comrades, you rise anew with  
the masses.*

Like the memory of our martyrs, love, poetry and the revolution from whence they come, shall endure and prevail. *Justo Pastoral*

# Cordillera Christmas

I waited for clues  
To what Christmas  
Might be  
For a Red fighter  
In these mountains.  
I thought the patterns  
Would be easier  
To decipher these days  
Of scientific know-how  
Than once when three  
Wise men  
And scribes  
And priests  
Studied texts and texts  
Of piled up prophecies.  
But no,  
Juggling stars and planets  
End as one pastime.  
By midnight I let in  
The crooner and his  
White dreams,  
And Christmas night  
Became a wild memory  
Of gilded trees,  
Incenseful liturgies,  
Family reunions  
Of *noche buena*.

How these managed  
To cross a hundred hills  
To sing to me  
Songs of long ago.  
Long ago,  
I lay awake unknown  
To my comrades asleep  
And composed for myself  
The scene where  
Jesus *must* be born:  
Joseph and Mary  
Here;  
The sheep and the Cow  
The Donkey and Me  
There.  
The manger yearning  
Impatiently to receive him.  
And a star would beam  
A ray for a tender glow.

The hours passed,  
And I unto a sleep  
Of tired frustrations,  
Into a day when  
The crib was forever  
Empty,  
While a steady drizzle  
Imprisoned us  
In a house where  
We were guests  
Without hosts,  
And each comrade



Was permitted to choose  
His kind of rest.  
It was one of those days  
When waiting,  
Just waiting  
Is protracted struggle  
And worthy  
Political work.  
I could see  
But only within  
A few feet.  
The world in solemn fog  
Lay and vacillating  
black birds  
Amused my eyes,  
Flying hither and thither,  
Trying but vainly  
To break the greyness.  
Before sunset  
Our Armed Propaganda Unit  
Received word  
From a peasant couple:  
How about supper  
With them?  
And we went,  
Got wet a little.  
The hut opened  
And this pagan home  
Greeted us  
"Merry Christmas,"  
A familiar greeting  
But from strange mouths

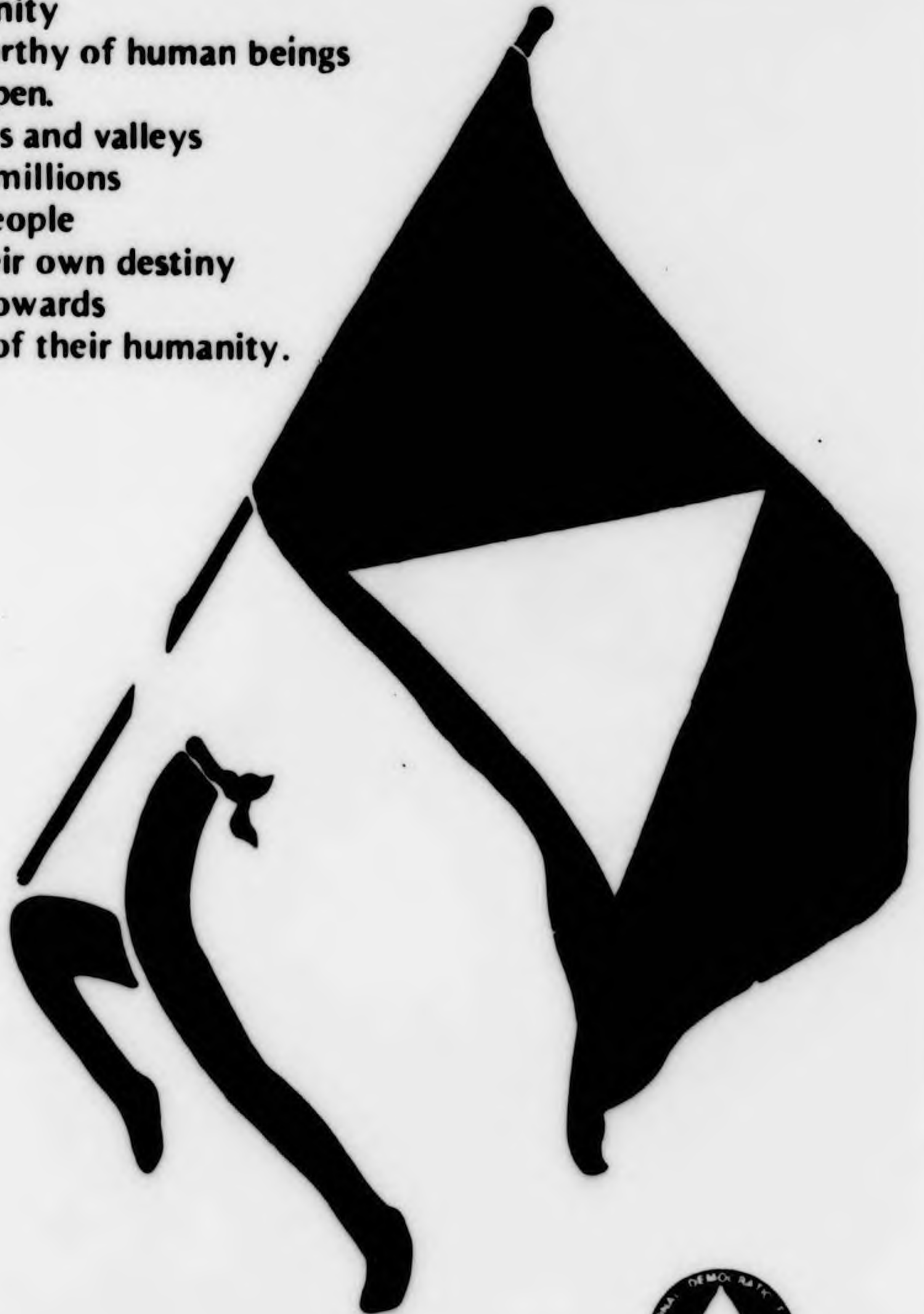
Stunned me,  
Cracked me,  
Shattered a mindset  
Of bourgeois illusions.  
And we sat down  
To duck stew and rice  
And wine poured  
From a coffee kettle.  
The *abung\** was small  
But we crowded it  
Still with laughter,  
And expanded it  
With the season's  
Love.  
The rain stopped  
comrades lit  
Cigarettes,  
And the hearth  
Warmed our hearts.  
Silent Night.  
Holy Night.  
I opened up  
To the rich particularity  
Of my new circumstance  
Stripped  
Bare  
To basic essentials.  
Yes, yes.

Where would his presence  
Be but where I  
Would be surprised,  
Not in a hotel room,  
Not even in the deeps  
Of the heart,  
But in an encounter,  
Of his witty doing,  
in one Agape  
In the midst of revolution.  
It doesn't matter  
If the foreign carols  
Are lost strangers  
In these mountains  
Of cultural communities.  
The terraced Cordillera,  
The *payaos\*\** are mangers  
Full of grace  
Everywhere.  
he who sums up  
Into a heart  
The aspirations  
Of an enslaved people,  
Truly is he born  
In fullness  
Of time,  
In fullness  
Of space.  
And I nearly missed him.

\*hut  
\*\*rice terraces

# TURN LEFT FOR YOUR RIGHTS

The right to dignity  
To live a life worthy of human beings  
We make it happen.  
Across the plains and valleys  
In their tens of millions  
An awakened people  
Are charting their own destiny  
And marching towards  
The realization of their humanity.



In observance of International Human Rights Day