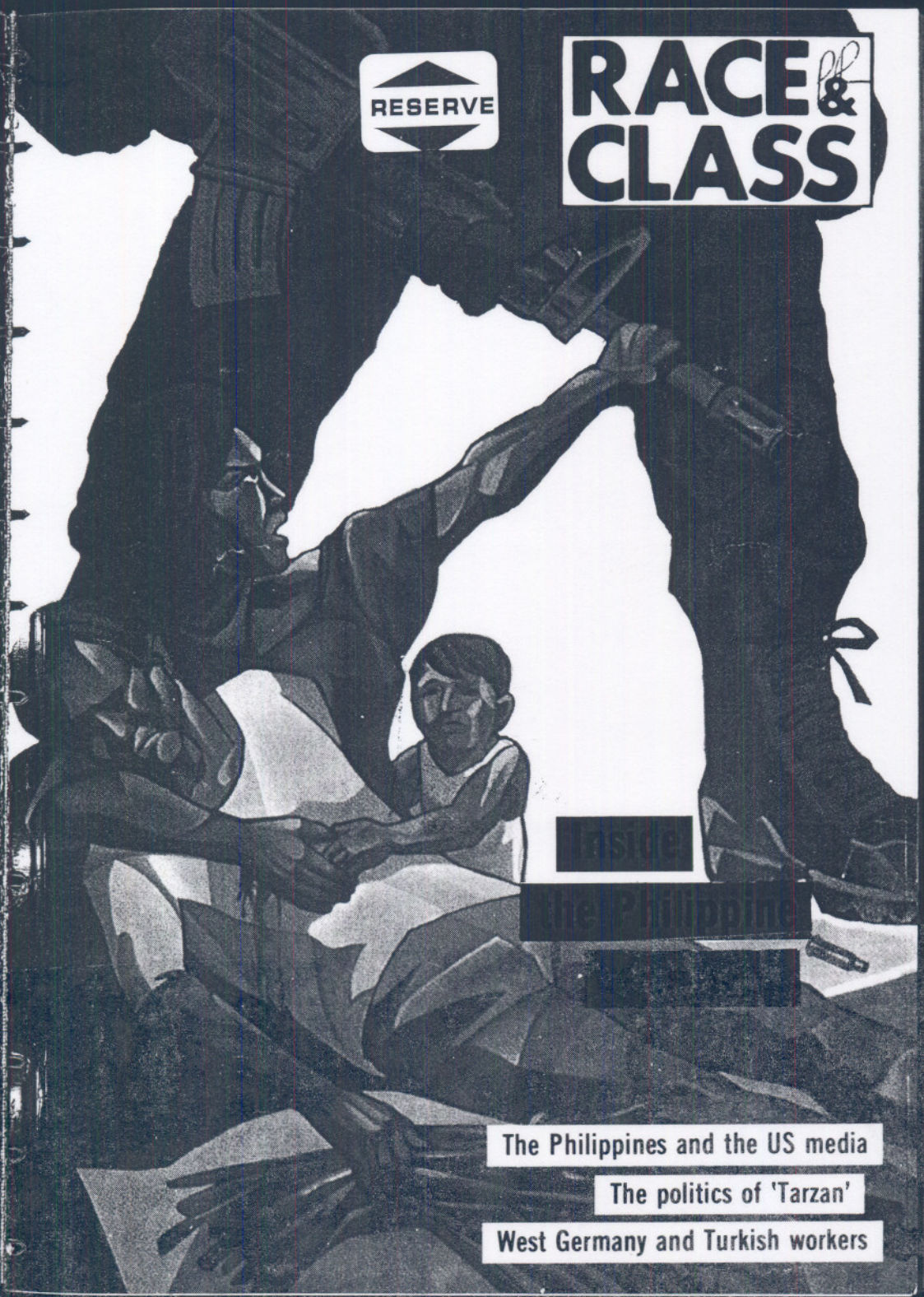
RACE & CLASS



Inside the Philippine

The Philippines and the US media

The politics of 'Tarzan'

West Germany and Turkish workers

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ZOLTAN GROSSMAN

Inside the Philippine resistance

The Philippines are made up of some 7,000 islands, rich in a diversity of natural resources, from marine life to minerals. Some 70 per cent of the population live in the rural areas, most are poor and landless. Mindanao, the main island of the south, has a population of some 12.5 million. Heavily militarised under Marcos, it is the source of nearly all the export foods produced in the Philippines – bananas from United Fruit, pineapples from Del Monte and Dole – as well as rice, coconut and sugar.

Some 500 multinational companies operate plantations and extractive industries there, and more than 75 per cent of the workers have incomes below the poverty line. In the predominantly Muslim area of Western Mindanao, Muslim rebels (the Moros) have waged war against the government for some fourteen years. As late as the 1960s the Muslims – indigenous peoples who had converted to Islam long before the advent of Spanish colonialism to the Philippines in the sixteenth century – were the majority on the island. But the balance had already begun to change from the early years of this century when a programme was started under the US colonial regime to settle Christians from the northern islands, who spoke a different language, on Mindanao. The Christian settlers were given land and privileges at Muslim expense – exacerbating the deep divide between Christian and Muslim already instilled by 500 years of Spanish rule. Successive administrations continued the practice of 'colonising' Mindanao in this way, ensuring a

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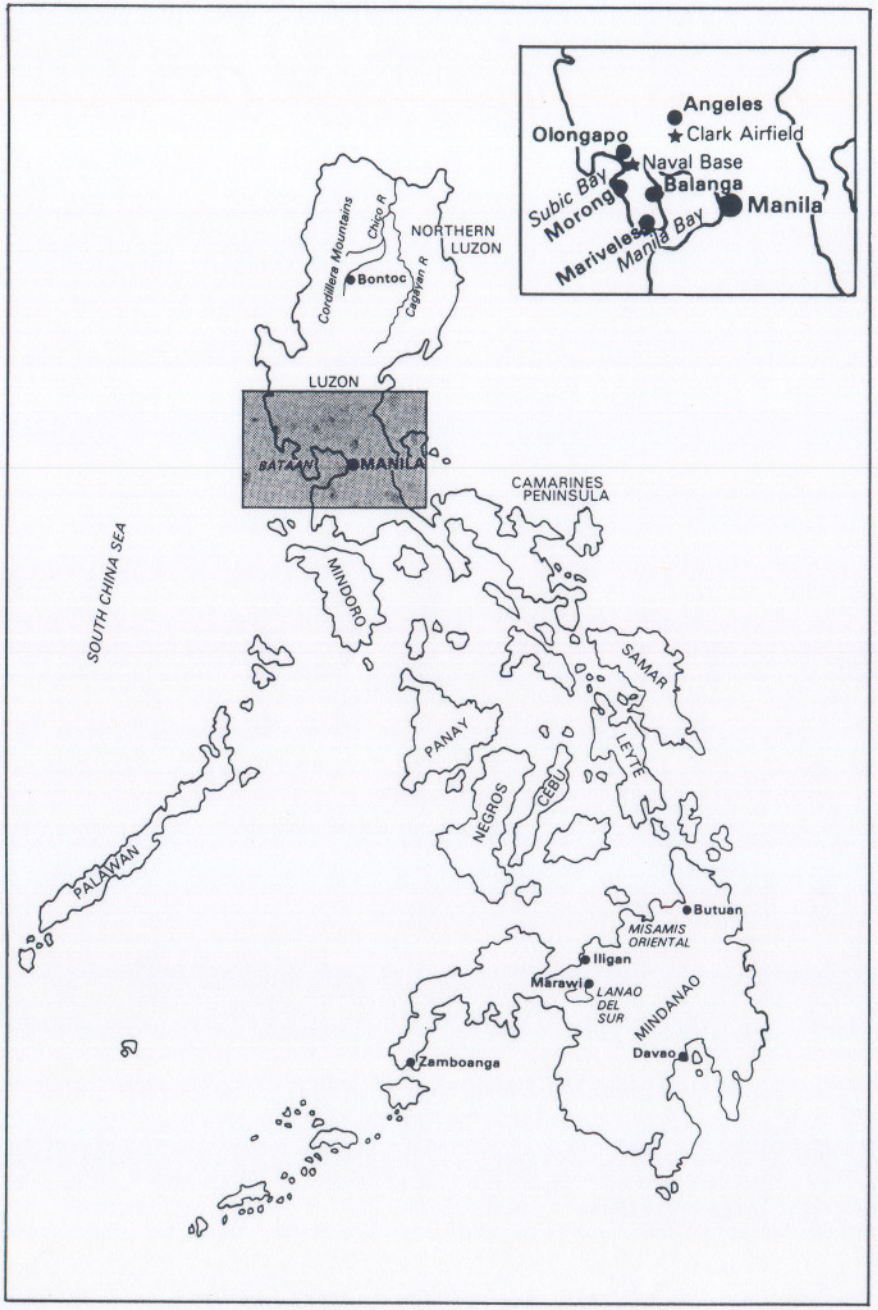

legacy of lasting bitterness between the two communities.

Further north lies Luzon, the largest island, where the capital Manila is located, and the export processing zone of Bataan. Bataan province (situated on a volcanic fault) was, until very recently, the scene of a long-drawn out mass struggle (involving, in June 1985, a provincial general strike) against the building, by Westinghouse Corporation, of a nuclear power plant there. At the time of writing the plant has not been activated. Luzon also contains the largest US navy base outside the US itself – Subic. It, together with Clark airfield, just to the north-east, are of fundamental military importance to the US. In the north of the island lies the province of Northern Luzon, with its spectacular mountain terraces where rice is grown, its fertile lowlands and dense forest. Whole communities have been driven off their traditional lands, which are rich in gold, silver, copper, zinc, iron and chromite, to make way for mining operations which poison the waters and huge scale timber operations which destroy their way of life. Here, in the Cordillera mountains, live the Igorot, now fighting to retain control of their lands.

Overall, between 10 to 16 per cent of the population of the Philippines are from national minorities, embracing a variety of cultural beliefs and ways of life. Like the rest of the population, all have suffered from the material depredations of imperialism, as well as the invasive cultural penetration of the US. During the American colonial period, the authorities introduced a public school system to instil US culture and ideology into their subjects. The goal was the creation of a consumerist and literate class which could maintain the economic programme after independence. This programme instilled into many Filipinos a sense that their own culture was inferior – a feeling that was reinforced by the awesome arrival of US military forces in the Second World War. Today, in Grossman's words:

> *In the middle class districts of Manila, an American can feel completely at home. Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonald's, Shakey's and Dunkin' Donuts flash their familiar signs, sometimes next to suburban-style shopping malls. Guards armed with shotguns open the doors for patrons. The employees are under strict instructions to speak only English (some elite Filipinos don't even speak their own language), and even the prices for a Big Mac are out of the reach of an ordinary Filipino. People go to fast-food joints not for a cheap meal but for the status of being American ... Manila is perhaps the only city in the world where one can be meeting with members of the revolutionary underground, look out the window, and watch a Boy George Look-alike contest.*

These are just some aspects of the reality with which the left movements in the Philippines have to deal: the unarmed, spontaneous, popular

uprising that drove out Marcos was one manifestation of a long and continuing process of struggle.

In testimony to the US House of Representatives subcommittee on Asia, given before Marcos was deposed, Professor Charles Lindsay forecast that:

> *If the opposition came to power, a wait-and-see attitude would emerge. But if changes are not forthcoming, the radicalisation process will intensify. There is little reason to believe the elite opposition will willingly alter the existing economic structure. To maintain its control, it too may be forced to resort to authoritarian methods.*

The pieces which follow, based on the author's visit to the Philippines in 1985, and written before Marcos was ousted, illuminate some aspects of the strength and complexity of a left movement that has been steadily developing in the Philippines over the last twenty years. And they also show, very graphically, that in Third World countries, precisely because of the way colonial capitalism has produced a distorted, disorganic development, there are as many revolutions as there are social formations – and the overall task of cohering them into one is a long drawn-out, tortuous and, of course, dialectical process.

The Editors

Bataan

The scene is not unusual these days in the Philippines. Thousands of striking workers, peasants and fishermen are barricading the main highway in Bataan province, west of Manila. At 6.30am on the first morning of the strike, the first trucks are turned back peacefully by the protesters. The Provincial Commander of the Philippine Constabulary (PC), Colonel José Andaya, appears on the scene, backed by heavily-armed troops and a Chemite light tank.

At 6.50am, Colonel Andaya gives a five-minute ultimatum to the strikers to clear half the road. When they fail to respond to a subsequent ultimatum, the tank rumbles to the edge of the crowd and Andaya asks the strikers not to throw rocks. At 7am, he gives an order, and the tank rams the crowd and ploughs through it. Amidst the screams and curses, the protesters immediately close ranks, haul away their injured, and link their arms again. When the military tries to ram a jeep into the crowd, the protesters push it back and place large stones under its tyres. It is a stand-off.

The strike in Bataan is no ordinary strike. It is a three-day general strike for the whole province, dubbed *'welgang bayan'*, or 'people's strike'. It does not focus on wages or union recognition, but on, of all things, a nuclear plant. The US firm Westinghouse has been building the country's only atomic plant in Morong, in an active volcano and earthquake zone. While a state of famine threatens some islands, President Ferdinand Marcos has shelled out nearly $2.6 billion for the plant. Efforts by movement lawyers to stop the plant's operations in legal hearings have failed, and construction is now complete.

The Nuclear Free Philippines Coalition (NFPC), an assemblage of local and national groups representing workers, environmentalists, peasants, feminists, students and others, has been organising for years against the plant, going from door to door in slums and villages. Now the time has come to shut down the province, under the banner of 'People's Power Against Nuclear Power'. The *'welga'* is a perfect illustration of the strategy of militant groups – from legal 'cause-oriented' groups to unions to the underground revolutionary alliance – to topple what they call the 'US-Marcos dictatorship'. It is this strategy which has made these groups the most powerful and dominant in the Philippine opposition.

I first hear of the general strike in the town of Mariveles, at the tip of Bataan. It is the site of the Bataan Export Processing Zone (BEPZ), a 'free-trade' district made up exclusively of foreign-owned factories. The factories were built in the Philippines for the same reasons the nuclear plant was constructed here, say the BEPZ workers. Low construction costs and wages, weak or non-existent safety, pollution and tax regulations all make the climate 'favourable' for moving plants to Third World countries. While the placement of factories here could be attributed partly to the success of the US labour movement in winning higher wages, the construction of nuclear plants in the Third World could be partly traced to the success of the US anti-nuclear movement in preventing reactor construction at home. Like banned pesticides, birth control devices or pharmaceuticals, the nuclear technology is 'dumped' instead in poorer countries.

The green, campus-like facade of the Zone is deceptive – inside one sees dusty sweatshops straight out of the nineteenth century, where the employees work on garments, tennis shoes or clothes for Barbie dolls. Over 85 per cent of the workers are women, who were originally expected to be nimble-fingered and docile – much as women workers are seen in Mexico or Korea. To the dismay of the government, however, they have rocked BEPZ with chronic strikes in individual factories, as well as three general strikes.

The women, from all parts of the Philippines, are paid an average equivalent of 30 cents an hour. They pay rent in barracks, or in shacks called 'boxcars' where there is just enough room for two people to lay down. Within the factories they are often subjected to sexual harassment, under a policy of 'lay down or lay-off'. When they go on strike, the military comes out in force. 'This is where the security man clubbed me', says a smiling ex-worker at the Mattel factory, who has since moved to Manila. 'I kicked him back.' It is women like her who took three days

off work to face down a tank, to stop a nuclear reactor.

Mariveles used to be a fishing town. Now, the 'fisherfolk', relocated by BEPZ, live in a village of open shacks away from the sea. With the moonlight shining through the palm trees, I negotiate a rocky path past ricefields. At the village, a lantern illuminates a group of people playing cards and singing while someone strums on an old guitar. They are attending a traditional all-night wake for a 5-year-old girl who died two days ago of lung problems. They gamble to raise money for the family, and sing ballads as nails are pounded into the tiny coffin. The girl lies in the shack alongside a small statue of Santo Niño, the patron saint of children. Her parents, who have already lost two other children, didn't have the money to take her to a doctor.

The fisherfolk talk about their problems fishing in Manila Bay. Pollution and huge Japanese trawlers have depleted the fish stocks, the main protein source for the country. Fuel prices and the demands of middlemen make it economically impossible to make a living, especially when a fisherman is not allowed to keep fish for his family. Perhaps the most amazing sight in the Philippines is a group of fishermen eating canned fish for lunch. The fish is caught by the Japanese in Philippine waters, canned on their canning ships and exported to the Philippines at high prices. Some fishermen have boarded the trawlers or thrown dynamite at them. 'If there's a New People's Army', one asks, 'why not a New People's Navy?'

Two weeks later, the thousands of BEPZ workers, the fisherfolk, peasants, students and professionals – a long procession of torches – all march up the main coastal highway. In a festive mood, they sing nationalist songs, and shoot off roman candles after dark. Drivers of jeepneys – the major form of transport in the country, modelled after GI jeeps – carry supplies and stragglers. Townspeople line the route to applaud and join the march, fishermen set off dynamite and church bells ring in greeting. The procession is along the route of the famous Bataan Death March, a subject of some of the anti-nuclear placards. Upon reaching the church in the town of Pilar, the exhausted marchers go to sleep on their banners. The next morning, they set up the barricades to block the road to the nuclear plant, and almost immediately the military attacks with its tanks.

The strike sends repercussions throughout the Philippines. Over 95 per cent of business and transportation is shut down for three days – 18 to 20 of June. On the reinforced military lines, strikers pass out leaflets to the nervous young soldiers who face the strikers, and some read them. A few of the soldiers flash peace signs when their officers aren't watching. As the strikers march in a drenching monsoon rain to a final rally in the provincial capital of Balanga, they are blocked by a phalanx of elite troops, who aim their M-16s at the crowd. The thousands of marchers are let through the military's barricade, but on condition that the soldiers body-search them, a process that takes five hours.

In the weeks following the general strike, the underground movement announces it has toppled over thirty towers carrying power lines emanating from the nuclear plant, using dynamite and wrenches to destroy the most strategic towers with the cooperation of local townspeople. The power lines, the NPA alleges, would carry electricity not to Filipinos, but to BEPZ and the two major US bases nearby. Colonel Andaya then carries out his own operations to hunt down the anti-nuke guerrillas.

In the anti-nuclear movement one can see some clues to the success of the mass opposition movement as a whole. One clue is the slow educational process undertaken over the years about the political, ecological and economic costs of the plant. Another is the common unity of different 'sectors' around a common aim. Yet another is the coordinated action of urban and rural Filipinos, still an unusual idea in the country.

Perhaps the most important clue is the different levels of action used by the movement. These range from public hearings to exhaust all legal means to stop the plant, to rallies, to general strikes that up the political and economic ante by mobilising Filipinos, to internal sabotage by the workers and external sabotage by guerillas actually to prevent the plant's operation. In this scheme, one can see the common formula for left activities – use all levels available and have them reinforce each other. The formula results in a sophisticated, even ingenious, synthesis between the legal and the underground, the city and the countryside, mass action and armed struggle.

The methods developed for organising the sectors also shed some light on the success of the mass movement. First, local organisers form groups through talking with neighbours or co-workers, and consolidate the groups with detailed educational sessions. The local issue-oriented groups later unite into regional or municipal alliances, which may enter into coalition with other alliances for an event like a general strike. The regional alliances, as well as national alliances based on trade or interest, may then fuse into a single national alliance. The result is that militant national alliances, such as the May First Movement (KMU) union confederation, the women's alliance GABRIELA, the Peasant Movement of the Philippines (KMP) or the League of Filipino Students (LFS) were formed from the ground up. Their decentralised formation, organisers say, means that the alliances are based in the grassroots, and are thus more democratic and less vulnerable to crackdowns than bureaucratic groups.

Most of the groundwork for this organising is laid by the underground. The National Democratic Front (NDF), founded in 1973, is the umbrella coalition of the groups forced underground since martial law was declared in 1972. It includes the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), which broke off from the old, pro-Soviet PKP (the

Tagalog acronym for the same name) in 1968, the year before the founding of the CPP's armed wing, the NPA (the only growing guerrilla movement in the Far East). The NDF also includes sectoral groups, such as the Patriotic Youth (KM), founded four years before the CPP, Christians for National Liberation (CNL), the Patriotic Teachers' Organisation (KAGUMA), as well as workers', peasants', women's and Muslim groups. Some of these groups have been involved in the forming of their open legal counterparts. The underground gives the space safely to discuss forming groups, building them and protecting them.

The NDF is united under a twelve-point programme to wage a 'people's war' against 'US imperialism and the local reactionaries'. The programme also outlines plans for a post-revolutionary society, starting with the establishment of a democratic coalition government – a united front of both socialists and 'progressive nationalist' capitalists. The principles include the free exercise of rights, popular culture and education, and self-determination for national minorities. In the economic field, the programme calls for land reform, full employment, social services and industrialisation in a mixed economy. In foreign affairs, it calls for non-alignment.

NDF activists often attribute their successes to the autonomy and decentralisation that has grown within the movement. All local, regional and national sectoral groups – whether legal or underground – generally rely on their own skills and resources. This method of working, they say, creates more appropriate responses to local or regional problems than those that would always be imposed from a higher body without consultation.

More importantly, though, a degree of autonomy within the movement seems to lead to a pluralistic exchange of ideas, as activists try to raise questions creatively that come out of their sectors. It is true that the NDF infuses Marxism into its work with these sectors. But, to my surprise, the process can and has worked both ways. Marxists, in turn, can be influenced by different ideologies – the feminism within GABRIELA, the environmental consciousness of the tribal peoples, the Christian ethics of church workers, or the freer styles envisioned by progressive artists. These ideas are synthesised with a class outlook and with each other, creating a fascinating mixture of outlooks within the movement.

For example, from GABRIELA comes the critique that 'socialist' countries, despite their rhetoric, have not liberated women. It has created a dialogue between middle-class women, influenced by western feminism, and working-class women, who often raise economic demands. Though issues such as abortion, lesbianism and divorce are too controversial in such a staunchly Catholic country, GABRIELA is successfully creating a type of 'socialist feminism' that other Third World women are experimenting with. Its workshop at the UN Conference on Women in Nairobi last year was one of the most heavily-attended. GABRIELA has also been at the forefront of the movement against the Morong plant.

One leader of the anti-nuclear movement tells what he sees of the NDF: 'Its being non-aligned and its reliance on its own sources make the Philippine movement distinct from other communist-led movements anywhere. We're concerned here with how to win, and how to be able to produce food once we win ... We're not engrossed with classical marxism-leninism. Nobody's gonna be able to understand that in the Philippines!'

Much was made in the early 1970s of the CPP's adulation of China. Its political and cultural outlook was shaped by the era of Mao Zedong, who was respected as an independent leader from a Third World country with a peasant majority, like the Philippines. But the ideology has become largely 'indigenised' by the very mass movements that the Party helped to create. Urban movements have balanced out the Maoist theory of 'surrounding the city with the countryside' with the experiences of urban insurrections, such as those in the late stages of the Iranian and Nicaraguan revolutions. An NPA offensive in the countryside might help draw the military's resources away from an urban general strike, and vice versa.

The Catholic Church, too, as in Poland and Latin America, plays a dynamic and controversial role. The church hierarchy, personified in Jaime Cardinal Sin of Manila, is identified with business sectors critical of Marcos' economic policies and human rights abuses. Yet Sin has also tried to be conciliatory with the regime; for example, taking part in Marcos' birthday party. The church refers to this combination as 'critical collaboration'. Father Jose Dizon, the deputy secretary-general of the Nationalist Alliance for Justice, Freedom and Democracy (NAJFD), describes the concept as 'like pork and beans – a little bit of pork but a lot of beans'.

Dizon is typical of the many church workers who take issue with the hierarchy's 'soft' stance. During the most repressive periods of martial law, dissent could still generally be voiced from the pulpit. At the Bataan general strike, it was nuns who negotiated with Colonel Andaya. Today, the leadership of many cause-oriented groups comes from the 'rank and file' priests and nuns, who articulate a mixture of Christianity, nationalism and class struggle they call the 'theology of struggle'. Since national democrats are called 'Nat Dems', and liberal democrats 'Lib Dems', church workers are called 'God Dems'.

It is not unusual to see rows of white-robed seminarians marching in street demonstrations, nor to be told to meet your underground contact at the local convent. In response to this activism, one Philippine Constabulary colonel declared to his men that to kill one priest or nun 'is to frighten thousands'. A few months later, a government paramilitary

squad killed an Italian priest in Mindanao, and a Filipino priest was shot in the pulpit shortly afterwards – two of six church workers killed in 1985. A handful of priests took on legendary roles by joining the NPA, including Balweg, Frank Navarro and Nilo Valeiro. Valeiro was killed in 1985 by the military in a tribal area of Northern Luzon. According to villagers' accounts, his head was mounted on a stick and paraded around by troops who shouted, 'This is the NPA!'.

While the idea of priests engaging in revolutionary warfare may seem unbalancing, it seems to be accepted as no more bizarre than other facets of Philippine political life. Certainly, their participation, for better or worse, gives the NPA an aura of legitimacy in some regions, adding to its 'Robin Hood' image.

Scratch a Filipino, and you may find an NPA sympathiser. Subic slum dwellers who had their homes bulldozed in June wished aloud that the NPA could have given them guns. When workers at a British-owned palm oil plantation in Mindanao were not paid their wages on time, the NPA raided the plantation treasury and lined up the workers to pay them. In May, the military shot it out with an NPA unit holed up in a Metro Manila apartment. When troops finally raided the building but found that the urban guerrillas had escaped, the crowd that had gathered a block away broke into cheers and applause. It is not what the NPA says but what it *does* that builds this popularity.

Cordillera

The battle-hardened guerrilla thinks of his next move. Deep within the forest, he is facing an opponent with nearly equal skill and determination. A precise but flexible strategy is absolutely essential; one false move on either one's part can mean the end. The guerrilla has chosen to encircle his opponent, flanking him now on both sides. He makes his move. His bishop takes a pawn. 'Check.'

These are the guerrillas of the New People's Army (NPA) of the Philippines, who, between battles, hone their military tactics on the chessboard. To them, the mock warfare between plastic rooks and pawns is more than a game. Pointing to the king, one laughs, 'This is the dictator.' To make up for their relative weakness in fire power, the rebels say, they need to have superior brain power.

I am in an NPA base camp high in the Cordillera Mountains of northern Luzon island, 275 kilometers north of Manila. I am spending a week in the guerrilla zone, which extends throughout much of the homeland of the Igorot peoples. The Igorots, like the other 'national minorities' are Filipinos who resisted conquest and cultural assimilation throughout the Spanish, American and Japanese colonial eras. Today, they are fighting giant development projects funded by multinational corporations and agencies, and are being joined by the NPA.

The Cordillera is not what comes to mind when one thinks of the tropics. Its cool – at night even cold – climate, dry ridges, pines and ferns remind an American more of the Black Hills in South Dakota than of mountains in South-east Asia. Like in the Black Hills, outsiders have long sought the Cordillera's rich mineral deposits, forest reserves and hydro-electric potential. However, unlike South Dakota, no 'Custer' has successfully consolidated outside rule over these mountains. Though foreign cultural and religious influences are strong, the indigenous peoples have fought to hold on to their basic tribal values. And this time, the Filipino 'warriors' are armed with M-16s.

The Igorots are famed for their sophisticated system of rice terraces. Concentrated in the valley of the Chico River, the terraces form enormous steps, each anything from five to sixty feet high. An intricate irrigation network has been maintained by hand, in some areas for over a millenium. Hiking on the terraces, one often comes across old women and men, smoking pipes as they tend the paddies. Along the Chico, it is as if a painter brushed the steep hillsides an unforgettable bright green. Without the sustenance of the terraces, the Igorots would have to rely solely on their slash-and-burn agricultural plots, and the outside market – including dancing for the tourists who flock to the region.

It is for this reason that the Igorots were alarmed when, in the mid-1970s, the martial law government went ahead with plans to dam the Chico, to provide electricity to lowland industries. Financed partly by the World Bank, the plans called for relocating the Igorots from their flooded lands to government camps. The Bontoc and Kalinga tribal village talked with the authorities to no avail. As a woman elder says to me in the Bontoc village of Belwang, 'Land is life ... Kabunian (God) gave this land to us for us to use, not for other individuals or countries ... Even our blood will flow over this land before it is grabbed. Let them come ... We would die for our ancestral lands.' (Igorot women have the distinction among other tribes in the world of being able to own and inherit land. With the phasing-out of inter-tribal warfare and the diminished stature of male warriors, the women have played an increasingly vocal political role within the villages. Whereas before, the wives could only influence through their husbands, they now freely interrupt or reprimand the male elders.)

The engineers arrived to build the dam; village women disrobed in front of some to shame them. Others were killed, and their camps burned. The military retaliated harshly. The Igorots, in desperation, turned to the NPA. Until that time, the NPA had little presence in the area; one male fighter had married a local woman to integrate into the culture. But then a process of recruitment began, the result of which today is a regional NPA which is, from my observations, at least 90 per cent tribal.

Over the same period of time, Igorot elders, youth and professionals drew together openly to call for tribal rights, culminating in 1984 with

the formation of the Cordillera People's Alliance, led by Attorney William Claver. Faced with the combination of ecological protest and insurgency, the government has, at the time of writing, shelved its plan for the dams.

The degree of local sympathy for the NPA can be seen in the militia training camp which is on the other side of the valley. Forty local kids train in a two-week course; all came under the guidance of their parents. The weapons they train with testify to the arms shortage the NPA faces: three US-made Armalites, Springfield rifles from the war against the Spanish and Americans, a few M-1s, an air gun, a mock rifle of wood and a beautifully carved homemade .22. 'Our weapons are not the most important thing', a militia leader says. 'Political unity comes before the armed struggle. Why fight if you don't know what you're fighting for and against?'

All political-military instruction at the camp is conducted by three NPA regulars in the Bontoc-Kankanaey language of the students. In one night class, the NPA instructor outlines how the village militia unit backs up the NPA, defends the village and its internal security. In between lessons, the class sings traditional songs, but with reworded verses about the dams, the military and the US. An older instructor, Ka Delfin ('Ka' is short for 'kasama', meaning 'companion' or 'comrade'), sings the tribal lyrical poem called the 'ulalim', which echoes hauntingly through the woods, mixing with the songs of the forest birds.

The alliance between the NPA and the tribes is personified in a very unusual priest. Father Conrado Balweg is a member of the Tinggian tribe from Abra Province. He is also the best-known guerrilla commander in the entire country.* In 1972, Balweg was a young parish priest who combined the Catholic mass with Tinggian rituals. Confession became a collective affair, planting and harvesting celebrations were held in the ricefields, and the tribal ways of sharing were encouraged as 'christianity in practice'. The same year, the Cellophil Resources Corporation (CRC) began a gargantuan logging operation in Abra, restricting Tinggian access to wide swaths of the forest. Under new decrees, the tribe became squatters on their own ancestral lands. Balweg and his parishioners delivered pronouncements against the project but, as Balweg says, 'The bishop just kept his mouth shut ... The old folks were being imprisoned, the houses were being burnt, the ricefields that were ready for harvest were being bulldozed – and no moral pronouncement yet from the church.'

For his activities, Balweg was accused of being an NPA sympathiser, though he claims he had never met the rebels. After receiving many death threats, he fled to the hills in 1979 and joined the NPA. 'We could no longer continue with our services, our education, so what should we do?', he asks. 'Should we surrender? ... The people should really stand on their own and build their society, their community ... It was very clear to me that the church is the business of the people.'

*As we go to press, the NPA in the Cordillera is being reorganised as the Cordillera Peoples' Liberation Army, ~~which is becoming a member organisation of the NDF~~. Father Balweg is no longer in the NPA, but is ~~still a~~ member of the CPLA ~~and playing a vital role~~ in the Cordillera.

The relationship between lowland and highland Filipinos is critical to the grand chess game in the country. In some countries, tribal peoples have been armed by foreign governments to combat other nationalist armies of the left. The Montagnards of Indochina, the Khoi-khoi tribes in Namibia and the Miskito Indians of Nicaragua have all had their populations divided over support for revolutionary movements. Why has the situation developed in the Cordillera more like that in Guatemala or Chile, where indigenous peoples are joining the left en masse?

One answer can be found in the programme of the National Democratic Front (NDF), of which both the CPP and NPA are members. It calls for the 'right of self-determination' for the 'national minorities' such as the Igorots, and the Islamic Moro peoples of Mindanao. Self-determination, the NDF stresses, is necessary if the tribes are to join the other sectors of society – such as workers, peasants and students – in a democratic coalition government. Ka Jun, a CPP regional officer stationed at Balweg's camp, claims that the NDF programme goes beyond the 'autonomy' offered in existing socialist countries, allowing the tribes a veto power over any resource development project.

The Igorots I have spoken with want to stay part of the Philippines, and accept small-scale resource and technical development appropriate to their cultures. Balweg says:

> The consciousness of our people in the Cordillera is we are Filipinos, but at the same time we have a different history apart from the rest of the Filipino people ... Our people, the minorities here in the Cordillera, have always been the collective master of their society. And it's not for any outsider to destroy ... Anybody who would not respect this, they have to confront it ... So it is up to them [the NDF] to prove that we respect each other, and we unite.

A Kankanaey student in the underground puts it to me more bluntly:

> At times there were problems – the lowland cadre didn't understand us as a nation ... It's impractical for us to fight alone, but we have to be respected. We don't want mistakes made here like in Nicaragua.

Most Filipino leftists agree that avoiding these 'mistakes' means understanding the tribal cultures, respecting their integrity and defending them as living, developing cultures rather than relics of the past. They do respect the tribes' closeness to the land, and how they have

fought to protect it. Activists often stress what they see as the 'positive' aspects of the societies, such as the 'communal' system of labour exchange. 'Marxism is basically the philosophy of the elimination of oppression of man over man', says Balweg. 'It coincides to a great degree with the present stage of the minority wherein the communal life is very strong. Class society is not yet developed ... So in that way it is very similar.'

Among some Christian and marxist activists in the Cordillera, however, one can detect the kind of romanticisation of western science that is common in a colonised nation. While they oppose large-scale projects such as dams and nuclear plants, there is sometimes an air of condescension towards the 'pagan superstitions' that are still strong in the villages. This criticism often barely mentions the poor track record of western science toward nature, or the 'material basis' for many so-called superstitions (though NPA medics do use herbal medicines).

Over the next three days, I observe perhaps some of the reasons for the confident air about the NPA. Though the government troops are approaching the vicinity, they have no guide and have lost any element of surprise. At all times, we know where the soldiers are, how many there are, what they are asking the villagers, even what they are eating. Villagers constantly watch the soldiers in the woods, and send runners up to the camp with messages, as well as rice supplies. One village violates its own taboo – of people entering or leaving during a sacred day – to provide this service.

One runner is roughly questioned by the soldiers, but keeps his message tucked away in his armpit. Another messenger wears the thick grass rain cape of the Igorot elders. Ka Lucas, a 77-year-old Kalinga elder at the camp, who was a guerrilla during the Second World War, is the political officer of his village militia. He joined because of experiences with the military in his barrio, including men being tied to banana trees and tortured. 'Our customs and traditional ways are being destroyed', he says. 'We join to recover our ways ... which is part of our inheritance from our ancestors.'

This relationship between the guerrillas and villagers has not always been so close. 'It used to be that the people would give us supplies because they were afraid of our guns', says Balweg. 'So we now have a rule that we pay fairly for everything.' (The money comes not from foreign government, but from an elaborate 'taxation' system; corporations operating in the vicinity pay up or face destruction of their equipment. Even CRC has to pay; logging operations have been suspended in some regions by the government to stem this form of fund-raising.)

Ka Victor also mentions an 'error' the NPA made in the early 1970s, when it carried out a major campaign against feudalism, and advocated the collectivisation of land. 'There was only one small problem with that', he says. 'There *is* no feudalism in the Cordillera. The land is already collective, and the people told us so. We changed that one in a hurry.'

On the third day of the military offensive, the guerrillas meet at dawn to prepare for a retreat. The military has been sighted 1½ kilometers away, and mortar shelling has been heard. It is a beautiful morning as we climb the dry ridge, knee-deep in grass, camouflaging our backpacks with branches to avoid detection. Leading this group is Pedro Dungoc, a Kalinga from the village of Bugnay. After a half-hour of silent climbing, we hear in the distance seven shots from an Armalite, and bursts of M-60 machine-gun fire. 'They're clearing the forest ahead of their advance', says Dungoc, shaking his head, 'A waste of ammunition.'

Dungoc, known as Ka AG ('Aboveground'), was before 1981 an organiser against the dam project. He was seen as a deputy to Macli-ing Dulag, a *pangat* (traditional elder), who was considered the foremost leader in the tribal fight againt the dam. When officials presented Dulag with papers stating the government's ownership of tribal lands, he stated, 'How can you own that which outlives you?' Dulag and other *pangats* concluded peace pacts among themselves, to put an end to chronic inter-tribal wars which prevented unity against the dams. Balweg claims that the NPA has played an intermediary role in conflicts between tribes and villages which threaten to erupt into warfare. NPA members are also not permitted to get embroiled in tribal warfare. The NDF publication, *Liberation*, claims that the NPA has arbitrated settlements in seven cases.

Macli-ing Dulag's role was seen as so threatening to government plans for the region that, on the night of 24 April 1980, a team allegedly led by an army lieutenant shot him dead in his home. Dungoc's home was also raided, and he was shot in the left wrist. Every year, hundreds of Igorots and their supporters gather near the Chico River to commemorate the assassination and renew the peace pact.

In some ways, the war in the Cordillera is similar to the usual guerrilla war in the Philippines (or in other countries), and in some ways it is different. It is a war where ingenuity and creativity – throwing off old strategies and creating new ones – is the only way to encircle the king. The old military practice of 'winning hearts and minds' is infinitely more complex than simply having outsiders coming in to plough crops or build roads. It involves recognising a cultural battle that has been waged for centuries.

It is a war where reclaiming culture is as important as recapturing territory. Like other indigenous peoples, the Igorots are faced with the perils which come with westernisation, such as alcoholism and suicide. It is not uncommon to see a young woman in the traditional Bird Dance sporting a brand-new 'Ghostbusters' t-shirt. But it is through political battles, the legal and underground activists say, that many youth are rediscovering their culture.

It is a war where future plans affect present realities – the promise of a Cordillera autonomous region ranks in importance with the establishment of a new guerrilla front. Whether or not the NDF is sincere to the Igorots is the key; as Balweg says, it will be 'answerable to the people of the Cordillera'.

It is a war where the long, slow process of establishing trust with the villagers has proved more effective for the NPA than major offensives have for the military. After my leaving the Cordillera (which was accomplished with a mixture of luck and good timing), I would receive a letter from the underground describing:

> the very heavy militarisation they staged just after you left ... It was the civilians who suffered the consequences – they had the real scare in their life. According to one of them it was just like World War II – bombs being dropped in the mountains and helicopters hovering all day long. As of now they have ceased their operations, maybe because they *can't find anybody anywhere*.

It is a war where the gongs of tribal dancers are as important as mortar shells, where rice terraces are as important as tanks, where omen birds are as important as armalites.

Mindanao

The Muslim region

Yesterday I arrived in the Muslim city of Marawi alone – the only white face in town. The silver-domed village mosques, the flowing colourful robes, the wailing prayers, Muslim caps and fezes and the suffocating military presence give the Muslim region a completely different feeling from the rest of the Philippines. In just a one-hour ride, I have crossed from the Christian to the Islamic world.

In order to pose as a tourist, I hired a motorised tricycle to take me to a museum on the campus of Mindanao State University (MSU). It is here that, after President Marcos' declaration of martial law in 1972, a group of young armed Muslims sparked an uprising. After raiding the campus, they seized the university radio station and broadcast a call to insurrection. Muslims, also known as 'Moros' (the Spanish term for Muslims), heeded the call throughout Western Mindanao, where they remain dominant. And thus the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) was born.

The museum turns out to be closed. Instead, to my consternation, the military had chosen the day for its military parade rehearsal. An army band played tinny marching tunes, as soldiers and members of the Integrated Civilian Home Defence Force (ICHDF) went through their drills. Automatic rifles of all shapes and sizes bristle everywhere. The paramilitary ICHDF has been accused of some of the grisliest atrocities of the war.

After the battle for MSU, the MNLF's Bangsa Moro Army (BMA) began fighting an intense guerrilla war for secession. Conservative estimates count 60,000 people dead so far. The BMA received support from both conservative and radical Muslim countries, in the form of weapons, training and providing a refuge for the leadership of different factions. The MNLF's factionalism, emphasis on leaders and reliance on foreign support proved to be its fatal flaws. The foreign-based leaders lost touch with the pulse of the movement and wishes of field commanders. In 1977, Libya arbitrated an autonomy pact between the MNLF and Marcos, which he renounced the following year. Foreign supporters cut off much of their aid, differences were exacerbated between the different tribal and political factions within the Muslim movement and Marcos offered financial incentives to BMA commanders to surrender, which many did. In a feudal society based on blood ties, the leader commands all authority; if he goes, his men go with him.

Like the former Huk rebels in Luzon, those who surrendered were hired by the government to turn their weapons against the 'godless' NPA, which has moved in to fill the gap left by the dwindling BMA – becoming a far more powerful military force in Mindanao. One of the groups carrying out particularly gruesome attacks on alleged NPA sympathisers proudly calls itself the 'PLO' – 'Philippine Liberation Organisation'. Other groups which had surrendered were hired to the ICHDF.

One BMA commander who did not surrender was Panantorgan Al Sabbar, whose nom-de-guerre is Narra Abdul Jabbar. Commander 'Narra' (which translates as 'mahogany') is a 32-year-old MSU graduate formerly in the MNLF-reformist faction led by Dimas Pendato, who is now aligned with the US-based conservative opposition. In 1984, Narra united the MNLF factions in a 76-day war which successfully held off government troops in the region, and gained a reputation as a folk hero after the battles. However, the Philippine air force was accused at the time of dropping chemical and napalm bombs on Muslim villages in Lanao del Sur. The small village where we meet the BMA rebels had itself been burned to the ground in 1976. The villagers seem to be very accepting of the rebels' presence and mingle with them freely.

The next morning, Narra arrives with a contingent of his men. He makes two things clear. First, he will not surrender, as the defence minister had recently urged him to do. He accuses those who have surrendered of being weak in Muslim ideology, and speaks positively of uniting the remaining factions into a loose umbrella coalition like the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

Second, he is an avowed anti-communist, opposed to the 'godlessness' of the NPA, and convinced that all communist nations

oppress Muslims (like in Afghanistan). However, like some other Moro field commanders, he is open to 'tactical cooperation' with the NPA, including trading information, training, and perhaps even covering for each other. 'It is my policy that the enemy of your enemy is your friend, and the friend of your enemy is your enemy', he says. He mistrusts the NPA's call for Moro self-determination, though he concedes that if it is sincere, he could cooperate or even participate in a revolutionary democratic coalition government.

The differences between this BMA combat unit and the NPA combat unit I was with last month in Northern Luzon are very apparent. There are no women with arms here. In the Underground, most of the contacts I've had were women – twice with a group of only women. The internal dynamics of Narra's group are totally different – fashioned by blood ties and focused on the leader. Narra refers to the fighters as 'my' men. Had an NPA commander said that, he or she would be hauled into a criticism/self-criticism session for a good five hours. The replaceable nature of NPA commanders may be one reason for the group's resiliency. Finally, the Moros seem much better armed than the Igorot NPA combatants I visited – including an M-60 mounted machine-gun. Many of the weapons (all of western make) came before the foreign cut-off, but lately the BMA has adopted the NPA tactic of capturing arms from soldiers.

How to reconcile the religious outlook of the Islamic revolutionaries with that of the socialist revolutionaries in the Philippines? This is now the key question within both movements in Mindanao. Certainly there are some commonalities – both are opposed to Marcos, and at least Narra opposes US influence over the country. Significantly, he says he feels closer to the Christian peoples of the Philippines than to the other peoples of the Islamic world. But isn't the religious fundamentalism he espouses irreconcilable with the class analysis of the NPA? Would a revolutionary government grant autonomy or even independence to a Muslim region still under feudal norms of society?

For some answers, I later turn to members of Muslim-Christian Dialogue, a group trying to build unity between Muslims and Christian settlers. This process mostly involves breaking down the 'savage' image that Muslims have been given since the Spanish colonial era. They say the MNLF originally tried to build a concept of 'Moro' that included *all* the peoples of Mindanao. Now the 'other' Underground has formed the Moro Revolutionary Organisation (MORO), which will try to unite poor Christians with poor Muslims outside of a religious framework. MORO is so far a tiny organisation, made up mostly of Muslim cadre pulled out of the NPA for the task; it is planning to start its own armed wing.

It's an uphill battle, to put it mildly. The working classes in Mindanao are far more divided than even blacks and whites in the US. Most leftist

activists I speak with seem to regard it as a lost cause. They refer to the Moros as the 'Achilles Heel' of the Philippine revolution, and potential future 'contras' for the US. They speak of Islam as a feudal and sexist ideology, but often without applying the same criteria to Roman Catholicism. Others speak of the possibility of a middle road between the class and religious positions, much like the Catholic liberation theologies. The more marxist of the MNLF factions, led by University of the Philippines graduate Nur Misuari, has vaguely referred to forms of 'Islamic socialism'. But the ideas are not developing fast enough to unite the BMA and NPA in Mindanao, and thus the Christian and Muslim communities.

The Christian region

We hike out of the guerrilla zone, passing some Moro farmers on the way, soon reach Marawi and take the road back to Iligan in the Christian region.

Iligan is known as the main industrial city of Mindanao. Dozens of factories – many foreign-owned – line the shore of the bay. The capital of Lanao del Norte, Iligan was quiet a few years ago; only lately has it developed a reputation for labour militancy. The Underground has also developed strength, to the point of operating a 'shadow government' that parallels the city government, and is preparing to replace it. The NPA is known to control the hills five miles outside of town – the soldiers don't dare go into the zone.

Two workers take me to tour their factory, owned by the Iligan Cement Corporation. Their union, affiliated with the militant May First Movement (KMU), is pretty much in control here. Wages are decent for the cement industry and accidents are virtually non-existent. The Swiss-Filipino management, intimidated by potential strikes by the workers (and strikes of a different kind by the campers five miles away), gave in to their demands. Just down the road in Lugait, the head of the Mindanao Steel Corporation (who also happened to be an active military commander) was kidnapped by the NPA in a daring daylight raid on the compound. He was held for the release of political prisoners in the area.

In contrast to the cement plant, the Pillsbury Milling Corporation plant across the road, partly owned by the Minneapolis-based agribusiness multinational, has been on strike for seven months. The workers and their families are based in 'picket-line' tents near the gate. They are living on rice, bananas, coconuts and greens – a starvation diet. Guards and troops armed with M-16s and an armoured personnel carrier have tried unsuccessfully to disperse the picket. At night, a searchlight scans the picket tents and the nearby hills. The strikers say that under the searchlight is a mounted machine gun.

Later that day, I take a bus past the Mindanao Steel plant, just inside the province of Misamis Oriental. In recent months, the province has

become the major hot-bed of insurgency in the country. In the area around Claveria, the military instituted a food blockade to starve out the rebels.

Misamis Oriental is also, not coincidentally, the stronghold of fanatic 'Christian' cults. The sects take a paramilitary form, and some are incorporated into the ICHDF. They believe that oils, Latin chants, and medieval-style shirts will render them impervious to NPA bullets. The fanatic ICHDFs have been accused by church groups of the grisliest atrocities of the war, including eating the livers and hearts of their victims.

The ICHDFs are often hired as security forces for the huge plantations in the area. Over 52 per cent of the arable land in Mindanao is owned by multinational agribusiness firms. The largest are gargantuan pineapple plantations owned by Dole and Del Monte. Other mountainous areas are heavily logged, often for the profit of local generals, resulting in heavy erosion and flooding. For these resource projects, peasants and tribal peoples are relocated to 'strategic hamlets' (or 'protected' villages like those used in Vietnam to isolate villagers from guerrillas), sometimes with the forcible backing of the ICHDFs or fanatics. After a time, the 'idle land' is confiscated and handed over to the company. Given the other choices of starving or moving to the crowded cities, the villagers opt for wage labour on the plantations. The worst massacres of civilians tend to occur where they refuse en masse to give way to the land confiscations.

The Lumads

My bus rumbles onward to Butuan, a ramshackle frontier town which serves as the capital of Agusan del Norte province, another hot spot for the insurgency. My interest here is to visit the villages of the Lumads, and look at their relationship to the NPA, much as I did in the Cordillera Mountains of Northern Luzon. But this is an area where the fanatics and ICHDFs have largely taken over the war from the military. A renegade ICHDF unit in the area recently massacred a group of loggers, and later engaged the NPA in a firefight. So everyone I want to talk with is in hiding. The incident was an outgrowth of an inter-tribal war apparently instigated by a Higaonon tribal '*datu*', or leader, who is backed by the military.

The tribes in the area tend to be the most culturally traditional in the country – keeping their languages, dress and communal social organisation. Many have kept their animist religions, though some are more Christianised than others. These cultural differences led the mostly Christian NPA initially to make some stupid mistakes. Some were killed when they let down their guard around the mountain peoples, who are justifiably mistrustful of outsiders – many of whom have cheated or robbed them. The Lumads, though, generally don't have the warrior tradition of the Moros, or the Igorots of the North. The Lumads' protection has depended on their evasion and isolation from outsiders, rather than taking them on in battle. The NPA would sometimes 'punish' Lumads who had previously agreed to cooperate and went back on their word. The NPAs interpreted this to mean the Lumads had abandoned them and informed to the military, when in fact they just wanted to be agreeable but not get involved.

With the intervention of church workers and tribal peoples in the movement, the brutal practice of 'punishment' was stopped in 1983. Now there are NPA units, especially among the Higaonons, Manobos and Subanons, that are completely native. One even calls itself the 'Red Warrior Unit'. Nevertheless, the dynamic between guerrillas and indigenous peoples is much less developed than in Northern Luzon. The 'mistakes' made by the Sandinistas towards the Nicaraguan Indians *were* repeated here in Mindanao. I regret not being able to visit the villages and document how the NPA is trying to pull out of this situation.

The workers' movement

After two days in Butuan, I leave for the infamous city of Davao. The bus goes south through the heart of guerrilla country, to the most hotly contested city in the Philippines.

Seven men guard the auditorium of a Catholic school in Davao, the largest city in Mindanao. The school is located in Agdao, an urban poor district which has achieved a notoriety of sorts as a hot bed of urban organising and insurgency; officials and residents alike refer to it as 'Nicaragdao'. Another district called 'Maa' competes for status by calling itself 'Maa-nagua'.

A crowd is gathering in the school auditorium; on the walls are taped schoolkids' drawings marking Philippine-American Friendship Day, which is marked on 4 July each year. One depicts a haggard Uncle Sam squaring off against a Katipunero – a Filipino guerrilla who fought both the Spanish and American colonists at the turn of the century. Newspaper photos have been neatly cut out and pasted next to the two characters; Uncle Sam is pictured with a missile-launcher, the fighter is pictured with NPA guerrillas.

Members of the audience, some with their arms around each other, approach an open casket in front of the auditorium. A nun places a small photo on the casket of a young man playing a guitar at a rally, in front of a sign which says 'Stop Salvaging'. The young man who once sang against 'salvaging' has now become a victim of that special form of summary execution.

A week ago, Nanding Torralba was riding in a jeepney near his home on a dusty street near the sea. A motor cyclist pulled in behind the vehicle, and pointed out Nanding to two men with military haircuts. He

ran, but was too late. They opened fire, shooting him in the leg and dragging him away. He was later found floating in one of the rivers that flow sluggishly through the slums of Davao. Besides being a folksinger in the movement, Nanding had been a leader of LIKADA, the Davao Youth League, an organisation for out-of-school youth. Hanging above the casket is a huge portrait of Nanding, with the inscription in Cebuano, 'He gave his life'. On both sides of the portrait banners are draped, representing different sectors of society: religious, urban poor, women, health workers, labour, media, lawyers and others. From conversations with those present, it is clear that all the sectors are paying their respects at this wake.

Also at the wake is a leader of the United Workers of Southern Mindanao, whom I will name 'Martin'. Martin recalls the chain of successful general strikes which began in Davao in the autumn of 1984. The strikes were directed against military and economic abuses by the regime. 'There is a large concentration of multinational industries here in Davao', he says, 'and 70 per cent of the national economy depends on Mindanao ... Here the military is now being used directly to shoot strikers.' He described various innovative strikes developed by Davao workers, including one he calls the 'eye strike'.

> We had a grievance and decided to stop work. When the foreman came by to see what was going on, we didn't say a word. We just stared at him. Same with the manager. It's a form of psychological warfare – very effective. The manager locked himself in his office and wouldn't leave. Eventually he sent out word that he'd negotiate.

Martin is someone who other labour leaders throughout the country directed me towards. He appears to them as one of the primary articulators of a vision of society after the 'national democratic revolution'. In great detail, he describes a gradual implementation of a system of workers' self-management, beginning with nationalised foreign-owned businesses. 'We can manage without the capitalists; we can run our industries without the managers', he says. In his own plant workers already make the day-to-day decisions over production quotas, a reality recognised after a drawn-out conflict with management.

From conversations with other workers in Davao, Iligan, Mariveles and Manila, it is clear that a significant number of them approve of the concept of socialism based on workers' councils. Some would be reciting their grievances in a bored fashion, yet smile and sit bolt upright when I'd pop the question, 'Do you think you could run the plant without management?' One shop steward in Iligan replied, 'Sure. We already do the union paperwork, which is quite a job. And on the night shift, there's only one supervisor anyway, and he's usually asleep!'

Martin says:

> We can make agricultural implements or boats, and trade them with the peasants' and fishermen's cooperatives for rice and fish ... The democratic coalition government would be run by the sectoral groups, who would elect their representatives from the bottom up and hold them absolutely accountable ... Proposals will be introduced at the lowest level, processed and combined by regional alliances, and then passed on to the higher levels. For a while, at least, we'd have regular governmental structures side by side with the sectoral structures, which are better equipped to handle problems.

Different workers in their discussion groups have various predictions as to how the middle-class elements in a revolutionary government would react to such a plan. Mario says, 'They will probably accept it. The population is 85 per cent poor.' Yet a woman organising in the Bataan Export Processing Zone, a concentration of multinational industries, says, 'There may have to be a second struggle.' All those interviewed, however, agreed that non-US western investment would be welcomed, particularly to offset the effects of an expected US trade boycott. Whatever the case, it becomes clear to me that one impetus for the growth of revolutionary fervour among Filipino workers is not simply hatred of Marcos or even the US, but the concept of workers' councils. The underground National Democratic Front has not yet taken a position on this question; it is a concept which has come out of the militant trade unions themselves.

The model that these workers offer bears a striking resemblance to that practised by Chilean workers and peasants in 1972-3 who, given the political breathing space by the reform-minded government of Salvador Allende, seized factories and plantations and ran them themselves. Yet the Chilean middle class was hostile to revolution, and the workers were not armed – factors which contributed to the 1973 military coup. The Filipino workers claim that these 'errors' would be avoided in their revolution.

Subic

On a rainy afternoon in the June monsoon season, a Filipino family of three picks through a garbage dump for scrap to sell, and maybe some food to eat. Their home is a shack in Pag-asa, a shanty town in Olongapo City, north-west of Manila. Across the river from the dump is the Subic Bay Naval Base. Ironically for its inhabitants, '*Pag-asa*' in the Tagalog language translates as 'hope'.

Most of the sailors who sail into Subic are unaware of the controversy the presence of US bases engenders in the Philippines. To the Pentagon, Subic and Clark Air Field, a sprawling base just to the north-east that is larger in size than Grenada, have been lynchpins in US military strategy from the Western Pacific to Vietnam and the Persian Gulf. To a growing

number of Filipinos, the bases are an American rationale for intervention in their economic, political and military affairs, and a haven for nuclear weapons.

The Spanish came to the Philippine Archipelago in 1565 to 'liberate' the islanders from their tribal religions. Admiral Dewey's fleet came to 'liberate' the Filipinos from Spanish rule in 1898, and ignited a new guerrilla war that left many villages razed and up to 600,000 people dead on the island of Luzon alone. In 1941, the Japanese came to 'liberate' the Filipinos from the white foreigners, and instituted their own brutal colonial government, headed by José Laurel (father of vice-presidential candidate Salvador Laurel). Like the Spanish and Americans before them, they groomed a group of wealthy Filipinos willing to collaborate with their political and economic designs.

What also survived, say many Filipino nationalists, were the economic guarantees for American interests, and US domination over Philippine military affairs, a policy enshrined in the system of US bases in the country. These guarantees for American companies and individuals touched off another guerrilla war, known as the Huk Rebellion, which was crushed in the 1950s with the support of a CIA team led by Colonel Edward Lansdale. The guarantees were under challenge again in the early 1970s, by street protests and court decisions. The challenge was temporarily silenced by President Marcos' declaration of martial law in 1972, which was hailed in a congratulatory telegram from the American Chamber of Commerce in Manila. Despite his swollen arsenal and armed forces, Marcos had to face two guerrilla armies, and then a reinvigorated movement of workers and students, opposed to the very presence of the US bases. A decade later, millions of Filipinos have flooded into the streets, and tens of thousands have joined the New People's Army to fight the 'US-Marcos dictatorship'. While many older Filipinos harbour fond memories of the second US invasion in 1944, saying 'Hi Joe!' to any white male in the street, a growing number of youths are sceptical. One young base worker at Subic said, 'Sure the Americans liberated us. But the Russians also liberated Eastern Europe ... and they've outstayed their welcome ... Everyone seems eager to liberate us or protect us, but no one is willing to really let us rule ourselves.'

Today, the American liberators walk up and down Magsaysay Boulevard in downtown Olongapo, past nightclubs like the Flamingo and the Woodstock, alongside burger stands and Shakey's. Uniformed shore patrol and marines patrol the street, rock and country music blare, and hundreds of the 16,000 prostitutes in the town grab at the Americans.

Olongapo is often called the 'biggest brothel in the world'. The prostitutes come to the city from the most economically devastated areas of the country, as well as to Angeles City near Clark. 'These girls don't do

this for fun', says Jim Mendoza, the Olongapo coordinator for the New Patriotic Alliance, or BAYAN. 'Their parents have to swallow their shame for the money.' The prostitutes are vulnerable to the superstrains of VD, which studies have shown rise whenever a large ship comes into port. They are often victims of drugs, botched abortions and beatings. One can see dozens of their abandoned mixed-race children on street-corners – begging, withdrawing from drugs, or practising their mother's trade – giving the city the feel of old Saigon.

Nevertheless, because of the economic crisis, the base is the 'bread and butter' for thousands of Olongapeños. Under the Bases Labour Agreement, base workers earn the average equivalent of 60c an hour, far less than navy base workers in the US or Japan. One employee who has worked in the Ship Repair Facility (SRF) for seven years makes less than $1 an hour. Declining to be named, he says that American students earn more at a summer base job at Subic. 'It used to be that workers would strut into a local bar with their IDs still clipped on as a status symbol,' says Mendoza, a former worker at the Naval Magazine, 'but no more.'

The base workers have gone on strike three times around economic demands – some prostitutes once joined them on the picket line – and have now raised some new concerns. Reports in the pro-government *Bulletin Today* revealed that twenty-eight Filipino workers on US bases have died of poisoning by asbestos or non-ionising radiation from radar. Low-level industrial sabotage, the workers say, is becoming more common – but not to the level once engaged in by the sailors themselves. Mendoza recounts how, in the midst of anti-war sentiment among GIs in 1972, mines destined for North Vietnamese harbours were defused by Americans in the Naval Magazine. Today, both sailors and workers are under the ever-watchful eye of the Naval Investigative Service (NIS), the navy's intelligence agency. It is the NIS, Mendoza says, and not the Philippine authorities, which controls surveillance operations here.

In 1974, an apparently accidental encounter with the NPA along the perimeter in Bataan left three navy officers dead. According to Mendoza, the incident touched off a two-month US military operation in the area. In 1981, there were reports of US marines backing up their Filipino counterparts in showing force in Bataan villages. And in 1985, the *New York Times* reported the presence of an NPA camp *inside* the huge, heavily forested base itself. (The Aeta tribal people who were relocated for the base have torn down much of the perimeter fence to sell for scrap.) The 1979 Bases Agreement allows the US actively to pursue any forces that attack the bases; and war games in June 1985 *inside* Subic focused on the danger of an NPA assault of some kind. However, underground activists in Olongapo say such an attack is extremely unlikely, as it would alienate potential support among base workers, and would bring down the full force of the US.

Even so, the US preparations for intervention worry Filipino nationalists, who fear the bases could become a flashpoint for a third US invasion. Professor Roland Simbulan, author of *Bases of Our Insecurity*, revealed in June 1985 the presence of US Special Operations Forces (SOF) at Subic and Clark, a report that was later confirmed by the US embassy. The SOFs are distinct from the Army mobile training teams and civic teams deployed on different islands. At least sixteen SOFs based at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, were reported in late 1984 to have been killed in covert direct combat in Central America – their families were told they had died in car accidents – and analysts like Simbulan wonder if the pattern is recurring in the Philippines. Philippine political life is rife with rumours of US military advisers being spotted in the field, or of the US air force providing facilities, pilots or even jets that drop napalm or chemicals in guerrilla zones in Mindanao, or of helicopters being shot down with Americans aboard. (US officials have confirmed that Clark has been used in counter-insurgency operations by the Philippine military.)

Such rumours were given substance in June 1985, when President Marcos told a French TV crew that, should the insurgency 'get out of control', he would request the 'entry of foreign ground troops'. Defence minister Juan Ponce Enrile then stated that evidence of substantial foreign aid to the NPA, which he admitted did not at that time exist, would be grounds for US intervention. Close on the heels of these pronouncements, evangelist Reverend Jerry Falwell told a July Prayer Breakfast at the Manila Hilton, honouring Philippine-American Friendship Day, that if the Philippines was in danger of falling into communist hands, he would recommend the use of US combat troops. To the grimaces of Filipino reporters present, he said that the NPA is a front for the Soviet Union.

No one before Falwell had tried to equate the NPA and CPP, both member groups of the National Democratic Front (NDF), with the Soviet Union. From Marcos to the State Department to the Pentagon, it is agreed that not only is the NDF fiercely independent of foreign manipulation, but that the foreigners who count aren't very interested in manipulating it.

Yet even if the NDF is non-aligned, Pentagon analysts assert, the expulsion of the US bases that it advocates would give the USSR a military advantage in the region. Rear Admiral Louis Chatham of the Seventh Fleet says, 'To move out of Subic would abdicate the South China Sea to the Soviets.' The reason Chatham gives is the presence of a Soviet naval base in Camranh Bay, Vietnam, which before 1975 was a US navy 'sister base' to Subic. Camranh services thirty ships – one third the number of ships in the US Seventh Fleet – and a handful of aircraft. The Seventh Fleet which is serviced at Subic has 550 aircraft and 70,000 personnel; and Subic is close to other US island territories. The Soviet ships at Camranh are far from home, and are more likely positioned to strengthen Hanoi's hand against China rather than to threaten the Philippines.

Among Filipino nationalists, the Soviet presence at Camranh is, in Reverend Manapat's words, a 'bogeyman'. (Manapat is a figure in the anti-dictatorship movement.) The only 'foreign enemy' the Philippines has, they say, is the one that already possesses bases in the country. If they can defeat the Americans, they ask, wouldn't they also be capable of defeating less-powerful Soviet invaders? Mendoza says:

> The Americans always say that the presence of the bases here is for stability in the Asia-Pacific region, to create a balance of power. But the way we see it, there's another reason, which we feel is the more important reason why they're here. Number one, to protect their economic interests in the Philippines, because Americans get a lot out of our natural resources ... they dominate our economy through the multinationals, World Bank and other financial institutions.

Mendoza pauses; a jet roars overhead to land at Cubi Point Naval Air Station. Then, 'In this age of Star Wars and ICBMs, these bases are, strictly speaking, not that important militarily.'

Perhaps in the geopolitical war with the Soviets, the Philippine bases have become obsolete. Yet in the many regional and local wars that rock Asia, the bases may be indispensable. Over the years, Subic and Clark have been used as springboards for direct US military involvement in China, Korea, Indonesia and, especially, Indochina. During the Vietnam War, they were the main support bases shipping troops and weapons to the battlefields. And with the advent of rapid deployment units, the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, and eastern and Southern Africa have been added to the list of hot spots covered by the 20,000 US military personnel stationed in the Philippines. Clark was used in the Iran hostages mission; and the bases would certainly be primary in any future 'oil war'. In Olongapo, sailors sport t-shirts that read 'Persian Gulf Yacht Club' and 'I got my tan off the coast of Iran'.

Manapat alleges that the bases also have a central role in nuclear strategy, not only playing an essential strategic command role, but serving as shipment points and storage for nuclear weapons. He points to nuclear emergency manuals and other evidence on the bases to support his claim, which the navy will neither confirm nor deny. The sailors' reactions to the navy's stance is to chuckle and roll their eyes upward. 'C'mon,' one tells me as we drink San Miguel beer on Magsaysay Boulevard, 'what base servicing carriers *doesn't* have 'em?' The t-shirts on sale in one shop give a more succinct position: 'Remember Hiroshima. Fuck with us and we'll do it again.'

The Vietnam of the 1990s is how Stephan Solarz (D)NY, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, terms

the Philippines. While insurgent forces in the archipelago have difficulty without any bases of operations in adjacent countries, any invader would have difficulty consolidating his hold over 7,100 rugged and heavily forested islands. Underground activists optimistically boast that the Sierra Madre Mountains of Northern Luzon, the birthplace of the NPA, are 'ten times more forested than the Ho Chi Minh Trail'. Nothing that a little Agent Orange couldn't clear out in a jiffy.

The State Department concurs with NPA projections that within three to five years it will reach a 'strategic stalemate', or parity with the military in the field. As it goes on to the offensive, the prospects of US forces replacing a collapsing army would increase. Sison (alleged former leader of the CPP) sees 1991 – the expiration date for the current Bases Agreement – as the critical period. A CPP official told me in a Northern Luzon guerrilla zone that the rebels would be willing to 'negotiate' over the US bases, rather than face a bloody final struggle with US forces, but that the bases must eventually go.

If the US feels its bases are immediately threatened, it could move Clark Air Field from the undefendable plains of Central Luzon to its islands of Tinian and Saipan, where it has already purchased 18,000 acres. Air force operations could also be moved to Thailand or Australia, provided that nationalist movements in these countries don't get the upper hand.

Subic poses another problem. Attempts by New Zealand and the Republic of Belau to establish the first 'nuclear-free zones' in the South Pacific are a headache enough for the Pentagon. But the loss of Subic would force the navy to rethink its regional and global war strategies. One alternative said to be under discussion in Washington is to cordon off Subic from the rest of the Philippines, and guard it with a massive ground force – not unlike what was done with Guantanamo Naval Base in Cuba, or the Panama Canal Zone. Surrounded by a ring of mountains, Subic could be a staging area for (in the words of a Georgetown University study) the 'reconquering ... of Luzon'.

The Philippine bases are perhaps the only places in the world today where US troops and anti-US guerrillas live, sleep and clean their guns only a few miles from each other. As long as the bases stay, they serve as a possible 'tripwire' for intervention, and an invitation to war. The longer the bases stay, the more US officials feel they must block any moves towards radical change in the Philippines, fearing that a change could mean the ousting of the bases. In a vicious circle, the more Washington tries to stifle the old dreams of Filipino nationalists, the more likely the bases will be removed whether the US likes it or not.

For many Filipinos, the bases are a symbol – of the dead in the Philippines-American War, of John Wayne, of low wages, of Madonna videos, of World Bank austerity measures, of prostitution. For these Filipinos, the dismantling of the bases – or in the case of Subic, its

conversion to a shipbuilding and repair yard – would symbolise more than an anti-American victory. For many, it would mark the end of over 400 years of domination by foreigners, with all the poverty it has entailed, and a Philippines that could look to its own cultures. It is jarring to realise that what could now be called the poorest country in the Far East is the one most tied to the US economy, and the seediest cities within it are the ones adjacent to the US bases. On a motorised boat chugging into Subic Bay, one Filipino base worker tells me, 'I work for the navy because I'm poor. I'm poor because the navy is here.'