

THE CLENCHED FIST*

Volume I Number 4

SPECIAL ISSUE

June 30, 1973

I. THE NEW GUERRILLA PRIEST

Because of the absolute censorship of the Marcos press, few realize the extent to which martial law attempted to pommel the religious sector of Philippine society or the unforeseen militance with which these recent inheritors of the tradition of Burgos, Gomez, and Zamora, the three martyred priests who tinderred the First Philippine Revolution a century ago, have displayed in answer to the Dictatorship. Except for the press, the mass media, and the teachers, no other sector was so singled out for flagellation during the first weeks of martial law.

Within seven days of the declaration the hatchet men of the New Society had detained 24 priests and nuns in Mindanao alone --although the majority were only under house arrest in order to cushion the impact on the public image --they had herded scores of KHI Rho activists, whose chief crime was their compassion for the ~~peasants~~ of the sugar plantations, into the Bacolod stockade, raided three seminaries in the Greater Manila Area looking for six hunted priests; the office of Fr. Ortiz, University Rector and Con-Con delegate was raided and his papers thoroughly combed for four hours, while Fr. Gaudioso Buen, another Con-Con delegate from the clergy was arrested in Davao. Of the fourteen priests who suffered prolonged arrest, two are still in the stockade. Of the five protestant ministers, including one lay leader, arrested for provocations ranging from writing articles to working with labor unions, one was threatened with deportation, and the layman was beaten and tortured so severely that he had to be hospitalized at V. Luna. Nuns were not exempted from Metrocom sirens either. Two Sisters in Davao were placed under immediate house arrest, and virtually every professional social worker among them placed on blacklists. The provincial superior of Good Shepherd Convent was admonished by Enrile himself on her member's alleged "subversive" activities. Even Seminarians were not exempt, five of them having been initially arrested, another five expelled from the Seminary through pressure from the military, and still another seminarian having been driven underground. Shortly, the military was to round up and deport five foreign priests whose "crimes" varied from directing an anti-Marcos radio station in Guihulngan to "subversive" content overheard during a sermon in Davao del Norte.

If the Philippine religious sector, with its more than 13,000 priests, ministers, evangelists, sisters, foreign missionaries and bishops, was stunned by this unexpected onslaught, they were among the first to recoup. And with some vehemence. The first anti-fascist leaflets were distributed in the Bacolod Cathedral very mysteriously the first Sunday after martial law. The PC, in outrage, demanded a command responsibility accountability and forced the parish priests to get down on their knees and personally pick up every last leaflet. Within two weeks, Fr. Louie Jalandoni, a secular from Bacolod, had gone to the hills to reify his priesthood in outright armed struggle and through service to the people --those who were appalling poor and too far from the affluent city parishes. In Manila still another articulate priest-activist had gone underground with the city resistance movement after issuing his classic appeal to resist: "Do not say that Revolution is a last resort: it is a first choice!"

With State agents demonstrating a new form of piety by attending mass to check up on Sunday sermons, and two priests actually having been arrested in their own churches during the bold February Protest Masses in Binondo, the accepted State protection of religion took on a strange odor. Among the Faithful, the New Society raised long standing contradictions with razor like clarity. Foremost among them is the current division of the church into the new radicalism, which has been termed revolutionary ecumenism, as against the inherited conservative, authority oriented structure which seeks to save itself and its investments through what the guerrilla priests denounce as "servile kowtowing of timid and opportunist church leaders to the present tyranny." They have not forgotten the frightful silence of the institutional church in Germany during the Nazi regime, or the manner in which the institutional church scuttled the inflammatory social action encyclical of Pope Leo XIII in 1890, with its Marxist innuendoes.

For the church in the Philippines reflects the same steep pyramidal power structure that characterizes its secular society, with its cluster of 150 bishops and moderators at the top of the stack, many of whom are themselves among the landlord class. It is not surprising that since martial law the majority of these have been uniformly reactionary. The Protestant hierarchy, in particular, having

Having demonstrated a unanimous endorsement of the US-Marcos regime. Repudiating these reactionary hierarchies, more than thirty priests, sisters, protestant ministers and lay leaders by their example of full time service to the National Liberation Struggle have served intention of defecting from the Enemy class. As one of the tasks of revolutionary ecumenism they attempt to expose what has long been one of the standards weapons of reaction: that religious people have no place in and are necessarily opposed to a Marxist-led liberation movement.

An underground letter from a guerrilla priest written in November 1972 clarifies this polarization of the church into two disparate forces which can be clearly recognized by not only their ties, but by whom they serve: the church that emanates from and serves the exploiters and the church that serves the people. Like other revolutionary priests, he refused to share the illusion that the two are one church: "The two are two. To accept the two as one (when in reality they are essentially in conflict) would be to give undue consolation to those who out of self-interest, security, cowardice, etc. are collaborating with the US-Marcos regime."

By January 7, 1973, the progressive religious sector of Philippine society, in spite of continuous harassment and surveillance by the military was now ready to issue a fearless and clear-cut line of ABSOLUTE NON-COOPERATION WITH THE US-MARCOS DICTATORSHIP. Denouncing the overt intention of the Dictator to coopt the hierarchy and clergy and use bishops, priests and religious people for their own selfish ends in order to make their tyranny more acceptable to the Filipino people, the guerrilla priests and an extensive base of equally progressive Catholic and Protestant laymen disavowed the use of religion for putting some kind of a stamp of approval on exploitation and tyranny. By committing themselves to Absolute Non-Cooperation they mean: (1) No endorsement in either word or deed of martial law and the illusion of "The New Society". (2) No endorsement for its programs (such as the sham land reform, the arrogant and fraudulent Barangays, etc.) Aware that the policy of Absolute Non-Collaboration would demand sacrifices, if not arrests, jeopardizing their security, image, buildings, projects, loans, they reiterated their determination that their priesthood must not be allowed to deodorize the US-Marcos dictatorship. Instead they pledged to voluntarily place their lives and their priesthood in the service of the people in the concrete struggle for national and social liberation.

The concluding interview with Fr. Dagohoy (not his true name), who is now actively committed to Absolute Non-Cooperation and to the principles of revolutionary ecumenism, is typical of the widespread transformation of the once passive religious sector into the new priest-militant; into one who sees his mass work with the New People's Army and the act of transporting arms by wrapping them in his clerical vestments as a profoundly religious task in order that he might dare to serve the people.

II. AN INTERVIEW WITH FR. DAGOHAY, A CATHOLIC PRIEST WITH THE NEW PEOPLE'S ARMY SOMEWHERE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE:

Q: Why did you decide to "go up" and wage armed struggle?

Fr. Dagohoy: Before martial law was declared, I had already accepted the national democratic line, together with those I worked with. Basically, this was due to the intensification of the pace of our work among the peasants and the youth. For example, we had been involved with a group of seven tenants whose corn field was bulldozed by a new landowner (who wanted to plant coconuts). We uprooted the coconut trees he planted. We got shot at but no one was hit. When he tried planting again, we uprooted the plants again and even ate the upod. The landowner filed a court case against us,

The morning of September 23, we had scheduled a rally; assembly time was at 7 a.m. Early that morning the mechanic of my jeep woke me up. "Lintik! Marcos declared martial law!" We were not yet sure if martial law was declared nationwide or not. Anyway, the core group met (at the bishop's palace) and discussed the situation. We agreed that we had to continue the work we had begun (conscientization and organization of peasants, youth and other sectors). But we couldn't expect to work freely in the city. In fact, we decided to leave it by 3 p.m. Later would be too late --we expected to be picked up by

the PC. Besides, the national democratic line pointed work among peasants and workers as priorities in the struggle. Our province has few workers and we had done previous work among the peasants (although quite reformist in orientation and program). So we decided to go up to the hills. But who precisely? We decided that it should be voluntary. Very secret nga a. Only I knew who had decided. Of the seventeen present, twelve decided to go up.

Q: How did you start with your work?

Fr. Dagohoy: We couldn't fit in my jeep --there were twelve of us. I went to get the bishop's car and drove to the seminary to borrow the Kombi. I also got the 30 caliber rifle I had given to a fellow priest for safekeeping. I carried it away wrapped in priest's vestments! We went to town about 40 kilometers away. The local parish priest was sympathetic but worried about my future. No one of my companions dared to go back home, so we split my clothes and other stuff. One of us didn't even inform his wife! We decided to split into four groups of three each. My team prepared to hike cross-country to our area 48 kilometers away. (We had the advantage of having some Party elements who had educational materials and had provincial plans.)

We were very lucky to have a cargo truck travelling to our area. People were curious about the rifle which I had wrapped in my vestments and stuck in a cardboard pipe. I finally decided to leave it in a house of a friend to be picked up by a comrade. We started with some United Front contacts. They accepted us as Underground people in hiding (wala pang armed struggle). After five days, we went to help a peasant build a hut near his farm. A PC jeep came looking for us. (Search had intensified because our province was the only one that didn't have any activists arrested in the whole region!). They searched the house we were staying in and took our host away for questioning. Pero talagang tanga ang PC. They did not even search my blue bag --and it contained 40 rounds of .30 caliber bullets plus a .22 caliber revolver. The peasant was released because they couldn't pin anything on him, but we decided to leave the place.

Our next contact was a rich peasant, but he had also gone into hiding. Only his wife and children stayed behind. The hut was in a "forest" without trees! We found other comrades there and so eight of us had an accidental reunion. We had educational DG's for six days. We decided to leave the place soon after because the hut was too near the open ricefield. Besides, the wife was rather talkative. Our cover of visiting harvesters was malabo because the harvest season was still two weeks away. Anyway, when the rich peasant came back, he set up a fake alarm and forced us to leave at night. There were leeches in the field.

I was to find out as work progressed how true is the class basis for determining the political attitudes --the most reliable forces for the revolution are the poor peasants. We finally settled among poor peasants in another barrio. After three days, a friendly policeman leaked the info that the place was to be raided for firearms and activists. The poor peasant told us: "I don't want to appear like driving you away, but I don't want anything to happen (to you)."

We withdrew to the next barrio. Some Party members brought more educational materials. We settled among (previously unorganized) upper-middle peasants. The policy of the provincial committee was to integrate with the peasants, maintaining minimal contacts while conducting a social investigation. We trained the eldest daughter of the peasant to help conduct preliminary SI (number of hectares being tilled, number of children, etc.) After one month, the upper-middle peasant wanted us to leave (again, class analysis!). He asked his administrator to instruct the peasants who would get in touch with me to convince me to surrender. I withdrew for a while to another area and stayed there for a week. Then I went back to stay with a middle-middle peasant who was becoming a lower-middle peasant. Besides, he was young and rather progressive. I worked with him in the fields, preparing rice paddies. I started contact work after preliminary SI.

By December, breakthrough! I met four advanced elements and proposed to them through a struggle-session the need to organize, not in the way united front groups organize for court cases, but something based on self-reliance, since we were frustrated more than once with the courts. Why organize? To

solve health problems together. To defend ourselves against the thieves (local lumpens who stole the chickens and discouraged people from raising them. We also agreed on the need for more education. All the time, I wasn't talking about revolution. It turned out later that I had underestimated them. They had been thinking about it all the time! They were the nucleus of the Barrio Organizing Committee (BOC) We had discussions twice a week, using Philippine Society and Revolution. Once they grasped the basic lines of the national democratic program, they were the best organizers for the barrio.

Q: How do you organize?

Fr. Dagohoy: First there are casual contacts and conversations. If the problems are mentioned, I try to link them to the basic problems and also to the need for unity and self-reliance. If they show interest, I invite them for further and deeper discussions. We also give out some materials, mainly translations into the local language. I drew the diagram of Chapter 2 of Philippine Society and Revolution --it's quite effective -- around one manila paper in size. Once they grasp the relationship among the different problems, the logical demand is for the program and Chapter 3. The peasant's wisdom never fails to impress me. One time, an old farmer with seven kids answered another farmer's question: "How can we do that if we have no arms?" "We have plenty of arms," he said, "but they are still with the PC. When they come --PAK! --and then we have their arms."

Q: Any reaction from the bishop?

Fr. Dagohoy: Yes. Around this time, the bishop issued a circular letter to be read in all churches. He asked me to come down. He also said that I was exaggerating my fears, that there was nothing to worry about. After all, even activists of national stature were only questioned before being released. (The implication was that I shouldn't worry --I was only a provincial figure!). He added that my fellow priests and relatives were worried for me.

Q: What did you do to answer the bishop?

Fr. Dagohoy: At first I wanted to go down and talk to him personally, but that proved impossible. I just sent my arguments through a third party. I told him: (a) It is in the interest of our faith and the church that I am struggling here in the hills; (b) Although my initial reason for going up was to hide, later I found the experience enriching, educating, and fulfilling for my priesthood. I was serving the real people --those neglected and deprived of service. The present structure of our parishes serve only 2% of the people in the poblacion. Priests seldom go to the barrios. If they do, it is to earn money for religious services. (c) Unless we struggle with the people, we can expect the worst for the faith and the church.

Of course, this answer was adapted to the bishop's language and mentality. For my part, the principal reason was the liberation of the peasants in the service of national liberation. I then asked for an indefinite leave of absence to ease the pressure on the bishop. If people asked where I was, he could say, "He's in Manila or somewhere else, trying to work out his confusion," etc.

A letter from another bishop helped. It asked for understanding the different political options of priests and church men in the struggle. We should respect each other's choice and not consider being Underground as degrading. (This was after the release of two other priests who were arrested by the PC on suspicion that they had contact with my other companions.)

Q: How did the peasants arrive at the need for armed struggle? Did their religious beliefs help or hinder such a decision?

Fr. Dagohoy: Initially, the religious beliefs of the peasants are very feudal and pacifist (Christian patience, etc.). But there were two ways they could be overcome. In our study of Philippine history, they clearly saw how the friars used Christianity to subjugate the Filipinos, preaching humility and meekness and utang na loob in the face of the Spanish assaults on them. The other way is to confront the question they ask. Is this the will of God? I answer: "What is the will of God? Does God want injustice? When we pray, 'Thy will be done on earth ... Thy kingdom come,' do we mean exploitation and oppression? We must match our desires and prayers with action. Hence, struggle! Look

at your children --they can hardly eat. They have few clothes. Look at yourselves --you own land which is yours by right." We also discuss the other common problems, like usury and high rentals and government abuses --how they had to bribe government officials and still they lost their court cases. One time, the governor asked every barrio to contribute 180 pesos to build a monument. The people themselves asked: "Is this democracy? Is this government really linked with the people?"

Q: What about imperialism? Is it true that peasants find it hard to grasp the nature of imperialism?

Fr. Dagohoy: I thought so before, especially when working with the united front. But you should hear the farmers themselves lecture on imperialism. Even the rise in the price of rice is linked to the raising of oil prices --affecting the milling costs; same thing with taxes. We realize that the people --the masses -- bear the burden so they really pay taxes for the rich. Same thing with the landlords. The harvest they steal from the peasants is more than enough to pay their taxes.

Q: What about the land reform program of Marcos?

Fr. Dagohoy: As of now, it is limited to radio announcements in this province. Besides, the provincial committee on land reform is headed by the vice-governor, and he is one of the big landlords! He even uses government equipment to clear his own lands. He announced recently that everything must remain as status quo, because of a lot of trouble day.

When we discuss the actual land reform program with the peasants, they see how deceptive it is. The price of the land seems small --two and a half times the average of three normal harvests plus 6% interest, payable over 15 years. But this totals more than even the highest current price of agricultural land. Besides, even if they could own the land, under the present system they would be saddled with more taxes than they can pay.

Q: What about the provincial military? What is the peasants' attitude toward them?

Fr. Dagohoy: The armed struggle in Mindanao has affected even this province. We used to have hundreds of troops here. Now, as of last report, there are less than a hundred. The military is as abusive here as in other places. Extortion, rape, drunkenness, etc. The peasants initially feared them and were rather servile, but after our struggle sessions and initial organization, they just deal with them for tactical reasons. Once the peasants are mobilized (and in two barrios where we are, almost all are), the military cannot do much. We have runners to warn us of approaching troops.

Q: How did you concretely prepare the people for Armed Struggle? How did they arrive at the need for the New People's Army?

Fr. Dagohoy: Initially, our problem was to hold them back until we had organized a larger area (around 10, or 20 barrios). We contrasted the New People's Army with the reactionary AFP. But we had to pay special attention to explaining that the NPA is not going to come in from another place but would arise from the people themselves. Otherwise, they might look at the NPAS as an outside force and and they would lose self-reliance. What about arms? While relying on ourselves and capturing them from the enemy, we might ask friends and allies for some initial help. Perhaps the region will supply at least seven to eight guns to arm the pioneer Armed Propaganda Units.

Q: How do you support yourself?

Fr. Dagohoy: Basically, we depend on the masses and help them in their work. All fulltime cadres get 25 pesos a month. At present I am trying to start my own garden and piggery from funds donated. But most of our work is with the peasants in the fields. Besides, we are not too many yet, and political work takes up most of our time.

Q: Was your work under Party guidance from the very beginning?

Fr. Dagohoy: I didn't realize it at the beginning. Our decisions were more spontaneous, but after a few days I realized that some of my companions were Communist Party members.

Q: Do the people recognize the presence of Party members? How do they look at the Communist Party of the Philippines?

Fr. Dagohoy: The Barrio Organizing Committee members definitely know that there are Party members guiding them. Hence, the image of the Party is principally that of a guide. While relying on our own efforts, hence democratic, we need to centralize our efforts and for that we need a party. We also contrast the Communist Party with the present ruling party of the rich.

At first there were many mistaken ideas coming from imperialist and church propaganda. "no freedom. They will take the children away from the parents. Parang piggeries na lamang ang family. No more permanent wife." etc. We point out how really evil the imperialists are. They distort the truth and present good points as evil. If a family is hard up and the father cannot earn enough for the family, the wife would like to help out in the fields, but since she has a baby she cannot. What if there is a barrio nursery set up and a few take up the task of taking care of the babies while the mother and father work? "Why that's good," the peasants exclaim. "We should arrange it that way!"

Q: What about Mao Tsetung thought? Do you make explicit mention of Mao when quoting him?

Fr. Dagohoy: Except in a very few cases, we usually introduce the topic this way: after discussing the analysis of the problems of the Philippines --the need for organization and self-reliance, we introduce the need for personal remodeling. "The revolution will not succeed if we don't change our ways." The Five Golden Rays are a real help. The peasants see the real need for attitudinal change -- to be selfless and not think of one's self-interest. They see this as necessary to prevent any recurrence of wrong tendencies. Hence the need for Party guidance. We study Philippine history and point out the weaknesses of Aguinaldo and the others. They didn't succeed because they lacked discipline, and vacillated. The peasants conclude on the need for proletarian leadership. Even the present opportunist leadership of Marcos, who sells the country to the imperialists, is a sign of his selfishness.

Before reading from the Red Book, I tell them: "I will read to you from a man who has given light to the world of oppressed people. But he has been vilified by imperialists from other countries and other enemies of the people. You might have heard about him. He is Mao Tsetung. This is what he says." The peasant never fails to nod his head in agreement with the quotations.

Q: Do you conduct criticism and self-criticism sessions? How do the peasants take it?

Fr. Dagohoy: In general, there has been no problem on this point. But once there was a member of the Barrio Organizing Committee who was really hard up and couldn't attend meetings regularly. In fact, he was eating puli because there was drought and corn and rice were scarce. He thought that the CSC was called only for his case. We introduce the idea this way: "We must criticize ourselves so that truth will always come out. This is the responsibility of the leadership to the people. This is our powerful weapon to strengthen our leadership and prevent vacillation and opportunism."

Q: What about the Christian dimension of the struggle?

Fr. Dagohoy: When we discuss the three proletarian virtues --selflessness, boundless sense of responsibility, and resoluteness till death --I realize that this is what Christ preached in word and deed. To be modest and humble in serving the people --this is the real Christianity, not the prayers and devotions. One farmer put it this way: "Our devotions and prayers are just like fertilizer. But the important thing is the seed --the essence of Christianity. This is serving the people."

Q: What about your priesthood? How do you relate it to the struggle?

Fr. Dagohoy: Initially, the peasants do not bring up the topic except indirectly. They are afraid it might be too touchy a topic. But I tell them that this struggle is meaningful to me not just as a Christian but as a priest. I consider my priesthood as essentially service to the people, to give witness to justice, love, and peace as Christ did. Then, when quoting Mao, I point out that as long as imperialism exists, there will be no peace since it keeps attacking the people. In fact, even in our local situation, it is not the people who start the armed struggle. They take up arms in self defense against the aggression of the landlords and the PC. Actually much of the relationship

between the struggle and my priesthood is realized in practice. It is closely linked to my own struggle and my private attempt to remound myself from my petty-bourgeois hang-ups. (I'm even of landlord origin!) Later some peasants even say: "If only all priests were like you." It's one thing to occasionally visit the people and another to live with them. Sometimes they ask to celebrate mass (quite informally, of course) and we do. But I don't initiate the move. I let them decide.

Another Underground priest likes to describe the integration of the mass and the struggle in this graphic manner: he says that the mass is essentially the offering of body and shedding of blood for the many. Such is the struggle undertaken by those who would give their lives totally to service of the people. They offer mass in the countrysides and factories and other places of the struggle often literally dying or being tortured because they dared to serve the people.

Q: Did you meet any problems of personal integration?

Fr. Dagohoy: Of course. I wasn't used to barrio life. Even the question of clothes and appearances bothered me at the beginning. But later I found the experience liberating. Instead of worrying how I appear, what I will wear, I concentrate on my relationship with the people. I also found it quite hard to get away from formal prayer and mass. (Even though I wasn't that faithful to reading the breviary every day). Plus the doubts and petty-bourgeois conflicts we are heir to -- "Is this really the will of God? Am I really doing the right thing?" But this is clear to me. In this present historical stage of our life, this is the only reasonable way to live. My only problem is how to blend with the masses. Even my complexion is burgis! I also find it very difficult to do hard work in the fields, especially during rainy season when it's very muddy. And without shoes, get there are plenty of leeches!

The peasant I live with is lower middle in status and goes to market only once a week. After three days, we consume what he has bought for a week, and spend the rest of the week eating rice and salt na lang.

But the ideological struggle is very helpful. "Be resolute, surmount every difficulty!" I definitely have never been more challenged in my life than when reading the Red Book. It's more challenging than any ascetical book, say Abbot Marnion or others.

I cannot think of ever going back to my old life. That has no more meaning.

* * *

(We acknowledge the fine work done by a CNL (Christians For National Liberation) activist in going to the countryside to compile this interview.)

* Civic Resistance Unlimited (CRUSH) issues this fortnightly bulletin. Please show your sympathy with our teams by retyping copies of this issue and passing them on.