

THE GLENCHED PIST²

Volume I, Number 6

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July 21, 1971

I. A SECOND LOOK AT MINDANAO

People's War is now a dustained fact in most parts of Mindanao. Long before the declaration of martial law NPA (New People's Army) cadres were effectively operating in eleven provinces, and Muslim freedom fighters had already fought pitched battles with the reactionary armed forces and the government financed Ungas, and had survived their first US-AID donation of napalm at the Battle of Buldun in 1970. For martial law has long existed in many parts of Mindanao, but really with a formal declaration.

After September 21, 1972, any perceptible change among the oppressed national minorities of Mindanao was neither one of astonishment or dismay, but of quickened mobilization and a consolidation of all revolutionary forces into various forms of massive defiance. Only two weeks after the declaration Magindanao guerilla companies staged their first outright ambush, and armed uprisings continued to escalate from Basilan to Cotabato. The Dictator's call for the surrender of firearms was met with historic obstinance from the national minorities, whose spontaneous boycott of the order was both resolute and clever. A typical example was experienced in an area occupied by one tribal group in which the Central Mindanao Command (Comcom) boasted of the huge quantities of firearms which were surrendered by the barrio people well in advance of the deadline and cheerfully enough --more than two truckloads of them, all properly classified. It was only after the March deadline that it was also discovered that there was no longer any running water in the area. Their militant men had dug up all the pipes in the area in order to make homemade gunags. It was two truckloads of these that they surrendered to the AFP while their more effective firepower was hidden.

Not only do the national minorities not surrender their arms, their revolutionary commitment is not individual, but tribal. If one single member of the tribe is arrested or shot by the fascist forces, the entire tribe will close ranks against the AFP and prepare to resist with no thought of sacrifice or hardship. It was the landlords and Christian settlers who introduced the concept of private property to them, for both their lands and their ideologies are shared in common, so that they become a collective and formidable strike force.

It is an oversimplification to see the struggle in Mindanao as primarily a Muslim struggle, although the more spectacular aspects of the national liberation struggle, as reported in the international press agencies has been the striking power of the Muslim Revolutionary Forces with their sophisticated weapons and occasional positional warfare. But behind the successes achieved by the Cotabato March offensive, when 27 towns were liberated, lies the network of mass bases and painstaking political work achieved by an extensive union of forces spearheaded by the New People's Army. This impressive achievement of consolidation of revolutionary forces has inflicted a total of 4,000 casualties on the fascist troops in only ten months since martial law.

The extent of this casualty list has been carefully kept out of the Dictator's press reports on Mindanao. But all this contrived secrecy has been ruptured many times: during the burial of a new Philippine Military Academy lieutenant in Baguio, whose brilliant career ended with his first assignment; on the reluctance of the national young men to register for military duty for fear that they will become cannon fodder in Mindanao, and the tight lipped comments of the residents of certain districts in Quezon City on the frequent brownouts along a certain highway, in a vain hope that the citizenry will not see the many death convoys ferrying the dead corpses from Nichols Field to the morgue at V. Luna in AFP trucks. At the height of the March offensive, the combined people's forces in Mindanao kept five AFP generals and sixteen full colonels at bay from their observation posts as they swept through South Cotabato. Ninety percent of Sulu is now liberated territory, as is much of Basilan, as indicated by the fact that the Goodrich rubber plantations on the island have been virtually inoperable for more than six months and have lost rubber export profits of about four million pesos.

Marcos has responded to all these facts with the aplomb of a reactionary ostrich; using rigid censorship and a pictorial psy-war he tried to project wholesale people's war as a mere Muslim pocket rebellion which could be neutralized by predelining the use of Arabals in the schools in certain districts predominantly Muslim, granting an inflated quota of scholarships to Muslims, and by fenging surrender pacts with renegade Muslim datus under the chandeliers of Malacanan Palace. What Marcos omits from the captions found under these "truce" photographs is that these ageing and renegade "leaders" who

have renounced a 300 year old struggle for some well oiled imperialist rewards, are now safe only in Manila. If they return to Mindanao they are likely to be beheaded as traitors, as has already happened to three such "leaders" in both Sulu and Cotabato. Marcos has nothing to say to the two-thirds non-Muslim victims of AFP depravity in the Free Fire Zones, although he admits that there are 100,000 displaced civilians for whom the government has no assistance of any kind because they are "too many".

To understand the sweep of people's war in Mindanao we must look far beyond an incipient Muslim Secessionist movement, for Mindanao is 60% non-Muslim today. Other equally oppressed national minority groups like the Dilans, the Manobos, the Bukidnons, the Bagobos, or the Tirurays constitute less than 5% of this diverse southern population while the remaining 55% are Christian settlers, many of whom are as poor and wretched as the Muslims, whose lands they were used to encircle. The Muslims, it is true, fight with passion and fanaticism because their hope is an autonomous region in those parts of Mindanao which are 85% pure Muslim, a hope which the national democratic forces respect and endorse. The position of the NPA-MRF coalition is very precise in denouncing the tendency to see the struggle in Mindanao as a religious war in which only the interests of the Muslims are at stake. The April nineteen point manifesto of the MRF underscores this point, as it demands that the abuses of the AFP against both Muslim and non-Muslim peoples in Mindanao, some of which are violations of the Geneva Agreement, must stop. To understand the significance of resistance in Mindanao, which is not only anti-fascist but demands an anti-imperialist reckoning with the 2,171 landlords who are being encouraged by Marcos to transfer their holdings to Japanese and American agro-industrial empires, we must examine all three of these fundamental sectors waging people's war in Mindanao.

The well known intractability of the Muslim freedom fighter in Mindanao dates back to the fanaticism and prejudice which motivated the Hispano attempt to drive back the Moors into North Africa, and the subsequent identification of the Filipino Muslims as 'Moros'. The Fall of Granada was only 75 years before the coming of Legaspi and much of the warped ecclesiastical hatred of Inquisition Spain was piously transferred to the early Shari-Visayan datus and their communities by the friars themselves. In 1565 a formal request was sent to the *Junta Real* of New Spain to enslave the Moros. It was granted. This was the standard sixteenth century treatment doled out befitting the devotees of false gods. Thus followed three hundred years of attempt at massive enslavement of the 'Moros' by the Christians and of counter enslavement by Muslim raiding parties. In time there were Christian communities in places like Zamboanga and Dapitan, but they were surrounded by Muslims. For 300 years the Spanish expeditionary forces failed to subdue the closely knit Muslim communities of the Lake Lanao region and the Cotabato River area until 1914, when the Americans succeeded in achieving by bribery what the past three centuries had failed to accomplish by brute force.

Both the Spaniards and the Americans engaged in punitive expeditions, involving the most barbarous massacres in an attempt to cow the Muslims during their successive regimes. Typical of these was the Battle of Bud Dajo in March 1906 and the Battle of Mt. Bagsak near Jolo in June 1913 in which about one thousand Muslim men, women and children were brutally slaughtered by crazed trigger happy American soldiers. The chief motive of both the Spaniards and Americans in their attempts to subdue the Muslims was to use Christian Filipinos in a protracted attempt to isolate and exterminate the Muslim Filipinos over the centuries. Religious intolerance served their purposes effectively.

By the Neo-colonial period following sham independence in 1946, the tactics changed from one of using Filipinos to point guns at their brother Muslims, to arming them with deeds to infiltrate the Muslim lands with Christian settlers. Many of these settlers were the tenants of powerful absentee landlords who lived in Manila or political ward heebers. Within 25 years this calculated encirclement of Muslim lands by Christian settlers with vested patrons was successfully backed up by Christian land surveyors, Christian Bureau of Lands Officials, and Christian Court of Agrarian Relations Judges. This land title type of invasion was so successful that Mindanao, which until 1914 was 90% Muslim is today only 40% Muslim. The population of Mindanao in the last ten years alone has been inflated by three and a half million Christian settlers, which is almost the equivalent of the total Muslim population of Mindanao, so that the entire population of Mindanao, which in 1948 was only 2.5 million has expanded to its present 9.7 million, 3.5 million of whom are Muslims.

During this time, few Christian settlers understood the manner in which they were being used as part of the master plan of a calculated invasion needed to consolidate

the hegemony of non-Muslim landowners and the new burgeoning imperialist agro-industrial empires, like Del Monte, Firestone, Goodyear, or Dole; for they too were exploited.

During the first Philippine Revolution, the Muslims rose spontaneously and took up arms against the Spaniards, completely overrunning the Spanish garrisons in the Cotabato towns of Pikit, Reina Regente, and Tambao with spectacular success when more than one thousand Muslim warriors assailed, in what must now seem like a preview of the 1973 Cotabato March offensive. Correspondance with the Muslims on a formal consolidation of forces, as with the Actas and the Igorote, was never followed up; and the single attempt in colonial history to unite against a common enemy was allowed to lapse. That the oppression of the Muslims is the more savage and historically longer, no one in Mindanao will dispute, but it is only in the twentieth century that they have recognized the enemy as both within and without. For Muslim oppression has too often been a matter of haggling with their own ruling class and buying them out. The Muslim freedom fighter today will cut down any faction that denies his basic right to a fuller life and fundamental dignity --including his own feudal datus, many of whom live the lives of medieval potentates, lavishing king's ransoms on the marriages of their daughters, and using their power in the Muslim communities as a form of political and financial security. Many of these have already renounced the struggle of the Muslim people and are actively supporting the fascist regime, as they see their own century old feudal hegemony threatened by the new class consciousness of the Muslim people.

Of the five million odd Christian settlers who have made the long trek to Mindanao, except for the 2, 171 landlords who wield power in Mindanao and an almost solidly Christian bureaucracy and professional services sector, the majority of these are peasants. It is to the CIA golden boy, Ramon Magsaysay that the credit belongs for implementing a distinctly counter-revolutionary plot which would transfer the wretched peasant of Central Luzon to Mindanao; lulled by the familiar sloganeering of "land for the landless", only to discover that the government had no intention of making any basic change in the components of his poverty, for he served a dual purpose. He not only infiltrated what was left of the virgin lands, making it simpler for imperialist interests to infiltrate and expand their empires, but he helped to create an undeserved reputation for Magsaysay which kept US loans flowing into government coffers as the man who had stemmed the tide of the Hukbalahap revolution by solving the agrarian problem.

For more than twenty years these homesteaders jammed the overloaded inter-island boats bound for Mindanao; their roosters, their sewing machines, and their one carabao careening from every inch of space on the lower decks, and their appalling poverty written on every taut cheek. The deed to a homestead did not change their basic poverty; it only made them more ready victims of the unscrupulous and the powerful when personal and environmental calamities like the plague of rats, adangan-adangan, or malaria overwhelmed them, forcing them to sell out their rights and hire themselves out as wage slaves to the big landowners or the agro-industrial consortiums that were already beginning to slice up the rich resources of Mindanao like a well-filled pie.

It is these transplanted peasants who have joined the New People's Army, knowing that the alleged contradiction of Christian brother against Muslim brother is a totally false one; something generated by their rulers to keep the oppressed of Mindanao from achieving a union of forces to repudiate their collective slavery. That union of forces has now been effectively achieved.

In May when the NPA made its presence known in Davao Oriental by ambushing two truckloads of AFP troopers in the Mati, Tagayona regions, the government retaliated savagely by creating massive "free fire" zones in the foothills of the Pacific Cordillera, forcing the people of Mati and Tagayona to flee from the indiscriminate strafing of the AFP fighter planes. At the height of the pay-war against the consolidated NPA-NRF revolutionary forces, the Marcos black press accused freedom fighters of putting a church to the torch and burning houses. Such solicitude from government forces which in the 1970's massacred Muslims inside their own mosques, is wasted on the people of Mindanao, who now understand the ruthless manner in which religion has been conveniently whipped up and cunningly fanned to divide and rule.

The Bilaans, Manobos, Dukidnons, and other national minorities, like the Muslims, have a history of resolute resistance against either political or cultural invasion that pre-dates the present struggle by four hundred years. Because they are a smaller group, Philippine history has consistently underestimated them. For collectively the national minorities never fight on the side of the rulers. An example of this tendency to both historic amnesia and ingratitude toward the revolutionary tradition of the national minorities is seen during the first Philippine Revolution, when the militant Acta

legions, under the formidable Aeta katipunero, General Ankot, united in one devastating tidal wave against the Spaniards, only to discover during the American regime that Ankot would be hunted down as a "bandit" and would finally be overpowered and placed on a reservation by his former Christian comrades. It is said that he died of a broken heart in the Aeta reservation at Dilar. Similar stories about the revolutionary zeal and centuries of historic resistance of the Igorotas can be found throughout Mountain Province.

Even before martial law, some of the most loyal and agile cadres of the New People's Army were members of national minorities both in Luzon and Mindanao: swift Fugot runners, wily Aeta couriers, Dilaan and Igorot warriors, defying the dictatorship within hours of martial law with every weapon at their command: firepower, bolo, poisoned darts, spears, kalis, and homemade guns. Like the Muslims, these national minorities were never conquered; only infiltrated over the centuries by hard hungry Christian settlers from other areas, ridden with non-Christian arrogance and frequently acting as dummies for powerful absentee landlords. They make formidable freedom fighters, for at stake is the pillaging of their ancestral lands. It is hardly accidental that one of the first targets of US Special Forces "civic action" teams in rural areas in the Philippines is among the national minorities, in an admitted attempt to win them away from "rebel" groups and back to the government.

The national liberation struggle in Mindanao has united these three diverse sectors from Basilan to Davao Oriental in the NPA-NRP union of forces, something unforeseen by the fascist forces who had counted on the old religious suspicions to permanently drive a wedge between them. Ponce Enrile himself admitted by the end of April that among the 16,000 odd armed partisans Tagalogs fight side by side with Muslims and dilaaans; all of them enflamed by a far more central contradiction: land and the long pent up fury of those who have been exploited and swindled legally and cunningly, within the pale of bourgeois law. There are the various national minorities who have been swindled and encircled by a more sophisticated productive system --and also a more brutal one --and the millions of impoverished Christian settlers whose feudal wretchedness was merely transferred from Luzon to Mindanao. For the second time in Philippine history they fight side by side, outflanking the Enemy counter-encirclements. This impregnable union of forces which continues to pulverize the AFP in Mindanao indicates graphically how in the final balance of forces there is nothing above class: not religion, through which the Enemy has divided and ruled for 400 years; not race, for these cadres vary from primitive-communal tribesmen to tenant farmers; only the irresistible revolutionary will of the oppressed.

II. EDITORIAL: PASCERN AND THE ARTS

On the night of June 14th when hatchet man Juan Ponce Enrile, Secretary of National Defense and currently Chairman of the Philippine National Bank, stepped onto the stage of the Cultural Center to read a citation declaring pianist Van Cliburn the recipient of the Philippine Government's first "International Artist" award, that handpicked audience with their Malacanan stamped invitations did not seem unhappy about it. If anyone in the audience was shaken by the common 20th century paradox that the same man who had sent more than 10,000, including old men and young mothers, to concentration camps exercising their freedom of conscience, and had ordered the strafing of millions of civilians in the "free fire zones" of Isabela and Mindanao, should now be so touched by the performance of a Rachmaninoff concerto that he could read the ghost-written citation with some feeling, he kept his misgivings to himself. For the packed Cultural Center was surrounded by thousands of armed security men and several companies of troops within call. Marcos himself was in the gallery that night and Indlda down in the diamond horse shoe below, for the two never stay within bombs-throw of each other, so that the succession will not be foiled in case of assassination.

Cliburn, who habitually prays before performances, should have prayed at this point for Enrile's victims. But like most gun chewing bright young Americans of talent, he believes that Art is universal and totally above politics; as for US-backed tyrants who say mass before ordering out the troops, they cannot be as bad as all that, and certainly they deserve the blessings of Art. Cliburn accepted the citation and the blood money attached to it quite happily, as well as an assumption that "the people" were in the audience. The stipend of 10,000 pesos cash and another 50,000 pesos in insurance benefits was a generous tip from the Dictator for Cliburn's superb performance in decodifying his regime before the world's financial cartels. Marcos is not the first Dictator to find the Arts useful as both a smokescreen and a counter-revolutionary tranquilizer. Cliburn, like Richard Strauss and others who saw no necessary connection between bourgeois Art and the uses to which it is put, must nevertheless be held accountable for the political content of their performances, intentional or otherwise, which by helping to stabilize oppression, only succeeds in designating the people.