

# On the Dangers of Reformism<sup>35</sup>

December 15, 1985

I extend my warmest greetings to all officers and members of the Nationalist Alliance-National Capital Region on their first regular conference. To all who are here today, let me express my most militant solidarity with you in your undertaking.

As my contribution to this conference, I have been asked to talk on reformism. I shall discuss reforms and reformism, US-promoted sham reforms, and US-Marcos electoral exercises.

## Reforms and Reformism

Especially because it is a legal democratic alliance, the Nationalist Alliance for Justice, Freedom and Democracy must struggle hard for basic reforms such as those immediately demanded by your program of action. If attained, these basic reforms would bring substantial improvement to the lot of the broad masses of the people and would be significant steps towards national and social liberation.

Whatever its degree of success within the existing social system, the very struggle for basic reforms exposes fundamental social problems and raises the people's level of consciousness and capability to undertake social revolution. But the struggle for reforms must lead to social revolution—the total liberation of the people from fascist, foreign and feudal domination.

The struggle for basic reforms within the context of the struggle for maximum revolutionary goals is opposed to mere reformism. For reformism is a mode of political thought and action which systematically rejects the people's sovereign right to rebel against tyranny and seeks to thwart their revolutionary demands by raising the false hope of changing the oppressive and exploitative system through gradual and superficial reforms that merely palliate fundamental social problems.

Reformism endorses and prolongs the unjust system of oppression and exploitation. Palliatives for festering social ills are offered or

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undertaken without attacking the fundamental causes; the iniquitous system is thereby preserved and even fortified. The essential purpose of reformism is to lead the oppressed and the exploited people astray and to attack organized revolutionary forces. Reformism is the systematic use of palliatives in order to preserve the fundamental interests of the exploiting classes.

While it spreads an unreasonable fear of armed revolution, reformism seeks to preserve the violent neocolonial state and the exploiting classes of big compradors and landlords. It raises the social cost not only in terms of the continued oppression and exploitation of the people but also in terms of the inevitable revolutionary solution. At any rate, it is the intolerable aggravation of oppression and exploitation within the moribund system that drive the people to take the road of armed revolution.

Legal political activists save themselves from the error of reformism by recognizing and affirming the people's sovereign right to armed revolution against tyranny. Additionally and without any direct involvement in actual revolution, they relate their legal struggle for basic reforms to the overall process of social revolution. Later, they may choose to directly and actively support or join the ongoing armed revolution.

### US Promotion of Sham Reforms

As a complement to violent efforts aimed at preserving the semicolonial and semifeudal system now in grave crisis, the US imperialists, the fascist dictatorship and the big comprador-landlord classes in general are promoting reforms. They agree that the best and most permissible kinds of reforms are those political, economic and military reforms that the US may be able to elicit from or impose on the Marcos puppet regime.

The main thrust of the so-called political reforms is to fortify US dominance and the joint class dictatorship of the comprador big bourgeoisie and the landlord class. The US is not really for the dissolution of the autocracy but is merely willing to give such concessions to the pro-US rivals of Marcos so as to resurrect a two-party system of pro-imperialist reactionaries which reduces the people and their organizations to mere objects of periodic electioneering. At any rate, the forthcoming election (if it pushes through) will go the way of the sham trial of the Aquino-Galman double-murder case.

Indications are that Marcos or his surrogate will be retained as the chief puppet of the US beyond 1987 or beyond any snap presidential election in 1986. The US plan is to have Marcos or his surrogate retain Amendment 6 and sign in 1988 a new agreement extending the life of US military bases beyond 1991. Only after this agreement will the US junk Marcos and ask him to retire for health reasons in favor of his vice-president, if he still failed to quell the revolutionary movement.

The main thrust of the so-called economic reforms is not so much to break up the bureaucrat merchant monopolies of Marcos and his cronies (because the assets already concentrated in their hands remain intact) as to keep the Philippine economy an agrarian satellite of the US—ever dependent on it for surplus manufactures and surplus capital.

The Marcos regime has been made to accept the most rapacious US economic dictates through the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The Philippines is being forced to concentrate on agriculture and shun industrialization; lay off workers and freeze wages; liberalize imports; devalue the peso repeatedly; give priority to debt service and so on. There is no way the Philippines can get out of the debt trap under the terms of the imperialist banks and transnational firms.

The main thrust of the so-called military reforms is to loosen Marcos' personal hold on the Armed Forces of the Philippines, tighten that of the US and improve its image to make this a more effective instrument for suppressing the people and their revolutionary movement as well as the legal democratic movement. This is what professionalizing the AFP means.

The US is determined to keep the Philippines as its client state. It is hell-bent on destroying the national democratic movement by brute force. Thus, it has been goading the fascist dictatorship to improve its image within the parameters of a sham democracy and pursue its armed actions against the revolutionary people more vigorously. But Marcos is insistent on having his hatchetmen in firm command of the AFP. The reinstatement of General Fabian V. Ver as chief of staff and the promotion of Marcos' relatives and other favorites within the AFP prove that Marcos cannot be removed from power without a bitter fight.

The so-called reforms being pushed by the US constitute reformism as well as barefaced counterrevolution. These can only further aggravate the crises of the ruling system. Ultimately these will result

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in more favorable conditions for the growth and advance of the legal democratic mass movement as well as the armed revolutionary movement.

The split between Marcos and the anti-Marcos factions of the ruling classes is bound to widen and become more violent. Marcos will continue to monopolize power and wealth amidst the decreasing inflow of export earnings and foreign loans. As they are increasingly deprived of entrepreneurial opportunities, the middle bourgeoisie tend to swing from a conservative or reformist type to a more progressive type of liberalism. Because they are increasingly condemned to a life of misery and want, the urban petty bourgeoisie have become increasingly receptive to progressive liberalism and have become a big source of activists who remold themselves to become revolutionaries.

Because they suffer the most from the crisis, the toiling masses of workers and peasants increasingly respond to the calls for militant mass actions and armed revolution. They are the main force of the national democratic revolution. They are the main source of cadres and members of the proletarian revolutionary party; and, of course, they provide the indispensable mass base for social revolution.

### US-Marcos Electoral Exercises

It is the political superstition of US imperialists that electoral exercises arranged by them with their reactionary puppets can exorcise the people's sufferings and the cause of social revolution. This superstition seeks to obscure the fact that since 1972 the crisis of the ruling system has reached the point that the ruling classes can no longer rule in the old way, with trappings of bourgeois democracy, that the fascist dictatorship can only rule by naked force and hold electoral farces.

All the voting exercises since US President Carter ordered Marcos to undertake "normalization" in 1978 and President Reagan, "democratization" in 1984 have been as grossly rigged as the sham referenda and plebiscites undertaken by the fascist dictatorship since 1973. The absolute power of the fascist dictator has remained undiminished. He lords over the captive courts and a fake parliament. And the armed revolution has grown in strength along the antifascist, anti-imperialist and antifeudal line.

The US imperialists forget that a short while before the victorious general offensive of the Vietnamese people, the Saigon government

could still stage elections. Yet that government fell. Electoral farces run by the US and its puppets do not solve the fundamental problems of the people but exacerbate the contradictions among the big compradors and landlords and serve to incite all forms of popular resistance against the fascist puppet regime.

As a matter of course, the revolutionary party of the proletariat, the people's army, the underground united front for the armed struggle and other illegal political formations boycott elections held by the US-Marcos regime. They must stress the totally evil character of the regime and the necessity of revolutionary armed struggle. They do not, in their own names, engage in electoral campaigns, field their own candidates and directly endorse or support candidates of the legal opposition parties.

Sometimes, boycott may also mean the active effort to persuade as many people as possible to keep away from the polls and even to prevent the holding of elections through the confiscation of electoral paraphernalia. The result of this type of boycott is not reflected on the records of the COMELEC or NAMFREL. When the people do not vote, the fascists can fake their vote just the same. But when the majority of the people have such a high level of political consciousness that they refrain from voting, the fascists can only make themselves more contemptible when they fake the votes.

Legal parties and organizations of the national democratic movement have the choice of either boycott or participation; or they can avoid these terms as semantical baggage in favor of a creative use of flexibility without losing sight of principles and without falling into the trap of reformism. The national democratic organizations can simply intensify their ceaseless campaign for the national democratic program against the US-Marcos regime and denounce the election as a farce. And they may either give direct or indirect support to the antifascist or progressive candidates.

Take the snap presidential elections supposedly slated for February. You may decide to extend direct support to the opposition presidential tandem which meet your criteria; or you may decide to extend only indirect support if you consider them undeserving of direct support. Unavoidably, the tandem can benefit objectively from your intensified campaign against the enemy and from their own concurrence with major points in your program. You can also benefit from the attacks and the gains made by the electoral opposition against the enemy.

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Whether you support an opposition presidential tandem directly or indirectly, you may criticize it on just grounds, but with restraint, and to the people's advantage. There should be appropriate venues for criticism and this criticism should help deliver the main blow against US imperialism and the fascist dictatorship. Support, whether direct or indirect, should not becloud our critical faculties, especially because the opposition presidential tandem is representative of the upper classes rather than of the middle and lower classes.

You can have your own rallies where you can fully state what you support and what you oppose. And you can also share the same platform with other parties and organizations in order to denounce the enemy and air the broadest common points of agreement. Furthermore, you can join an electoral coalition not only because you directly or indirectly support the opposition presidential tandem, but also because you are interested in getting progressive candidates nominated and elected in local elections and, more importantly, because you are interested in reaching the masses, whatever their level of political consciousness and in combining with all possible organized forces to act against electoral fraud and terror and their adverse effects.

In whatever way and to whatever extent you may decide to utilize the elections staged by the US-Marcos regime, you must understand and make evident to the people that the electoral struggle is inferior and merely supplementary to other forms of political struggle. To revolutionaries, it comes fourth to armed struggle, people's strikes and other mass actions. Reformists, however, rate elections as the sole or main method of doing away with the fascist dictatorship.

We are certain that the forthcoming presidential election will be characterized by rampant fraud and terrorism. It is designed to give the fascist dictatorship a so-called fresh mandate to pursue an antinational and antidemocratic line and launch bloodier campaigns of suppression against the people in the name of anticommunism.

While we denounce the farcical character of the election and point out the scheme of fraud and terrorism, we allow our antifascist allies to get as many votes as they can and rouse the people to defend their ballots. The opposition is sure to win in a clean and honest election. But there will be none of this. If cheated again, the opposition parties or most of their members will tend to become more supportive of more effective forms of struggle against the common enemy.

If, against all odds, the opposition won, this would be something to be happy about in the event that the elected president could substantially improve the situation by having to rely on a broad democratic coalition. The forces of the national democratic movement could thereby be able to legally achieve some of their demands for the benefit of the entire people.

At the moment, it is reasonable to anticipate that the forthcoming election would result in something as outrageous as the outcome of the sham trial of the assassination of Benigno S. Aquino, Jr. No fascist dictatorship has ever allowed himself to be defeated by some peaceful means of his own making. There is no time and no way for the electoral opposition parties to overcome Marcos' autocratic authority and his control and use of the military and paramilitary forces, the major mass media, most barangay officials, the electoral rules, the COMELEC, government resources, and so on before the snap presidential election in 1986 or even the regularly scheduled one in 1987.

The national democratic movement must anticipate the people's outrage over the sham reelection of President Marcos. It should be able to absorb and utilize the energy of the people for effective actions far greater in magnitude and intensity than we have ever seen in our country. The people simply cannot take another six years of the Marcos fascist puppet regime.

It is of acute urgency for the Nationalist Alliance for Justice, Freedom and Democracy to strengthen the ranks of the united front for the national democratic revolution against the fascist dictatorial regime of the US-Marcos clique. The ceaseless escalation of the enemy onslaught must be met with the intensification of all forms of popular resistance if victory were ultimately to be achieved.

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