Editorial

Time running out in the Philippines

One year ago, Feb. 25, 1986, the 20-year government of American ally Ferdinand Marcos came to a dramatic end in the Philippines. The Marcos government was brought down by a combination of the U.S. State Department, which executed the military coup against Marcos, and the "people's power" movement against Marcos fomented by Jaime Cardinal Sin. Both the United States and Cardinal Sin promised that once the corrupt dictator Marcos were pushed out of the way, "the rebels would come down from the hills" and the 18-year increasingly dangerous insurgency of the New People's Army would end. The Philippines would again become a showplace of democracy and economic prosperity.

Nothing of the sort has occurred, as this publication alone warned during the final days of the Marcos government.

After one year, although President Corazon Aquino legitimized her government with the overwhelming mandate for her constitution in a national referendum Feb. 2, the Philippines crisis has reached new heights of danger to that nation and to the strategic position of the free world in Asia.

Despite every effort by the Aquino government to come to a peaceful agreement with the New People's Army, the Philippines today stands on the brink of all-out civil war. After using the 60-day ceasefire begun Dec. 10 to build up its military and political position throughout the country, the NPA has proclaimed that it will not renew the ceasefire, and has already announced its military offensive with attacks on both soldiers of the Armed Forces and civilians. From Manila comes the word that the NPA already has significant control of provinces immediately adjacent to Manila.

If the Philippines government and armed forces now resort to a purely military offensive against the NPA, it will fail—just as it failed under Marcos. The insurgency cannot be halted unless there is a total national commitment to economic development. The recruiting ground for the NPA is the disenfranchised farmer of the Philippines, who is now starving as the sugar and other commodity plantations have ground to a halt. The NPA's recruiting ground is the barrios of the nation's cities, where the squalor matches that of the worst slums of Bombay, Calcutta, and Brazil.

American statesman Lyndon LaRouche advised Ferdinand Marcos, in the latter months of his government, to take immediate drastic action to rescue the Philippine economy. This action requires a total repudiation of the supranational power of the International Monetary Fund, whose austerity conditionalities after 1983 broke the back of the economy and forced it into negative growth rates for the first time since Japanese occupation in World War II. It requires the "Peruvian solution" for the Philippines, in which the payment of debt is placed second to the well-being of the population.

Marcos failed to act, in deference to his illusion that the United States would continue to back him if he played ball with the IMF. That sin of omission brought about his downfall.

The same challenge is now before Aquino. If the government does not take immediate action, no matter how much Aquino hails the new democratic Philippines, the NPA and the Theology of Liberation organizations in its orbit will reap the benefits of the dire poverty destroying the population.

The declaration of the Iustitia et Pax commission of the Vatican, on "An Ethical Approach to the International Debt Question," released in January has handed Aquino the necessary moral armor to break with the austerity policies of the IMF that have destroyed the nation. The Vatican repudiates the usurious policies of the IMF and its death policy against nations. In the Philippines, this is an implicit challenge to Cardinal Sin, who declared in May 1986 in Washington, his total endorsement of the Fund and who has nurtured the Theology of Liberation NPA.

In the immediate weeks ahead, patriots in the Philippines armed forces and government will have to face this issue. If not, then the Philippines faces at best a protracted and bloody civil war.