

Cory fiddles while Philippines burn

by Linda de Hoyos

On Oct. 8, Gaston Sigur, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific affairs, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that under President Corazon Aquino, "the Philippines has changed enormously for the better over the past year-and-a-half, in ways that strengthen basic U.S. interests and the cause of democracy throughout the world." Sigur also offered the claim that the "Communist Party of the Philippines [and the New People's Army insurgency] has lost some political momentum since the departure of former President Marcos."

Sigur's "evaluations" are precisely opposite to the reality in the Philippines, and even to the perceptions of the Philippine crisis transmitted by the international media. As the Aquino government lists to the left and then to the right, the lack of direction and will from Malacanang Palace threatens to plunge the nation into civil war, or simply, the Soviet-backed NPA will march into Manila and govern as the "Sandinistas" of Asia.

The Aquino government is issuing contradictory signals on how it intends to deal with the insurgency, and also with the growing number of private armies and outlawed rebel troops menacing the government. As Sigur was in Washington extolling Aquino's "democracy," the Aquino-appointed president of the Senate, Jovito Salonga, was threatening martial law. After a briefing from Armed Forces Chief of Staff Fidel Ramos, Salonga declared that martial law "would be inevitable" if the security situation continued to deteriorate under threats from both the left and right, according to Kyodo News Oct. 9.

Salonga's remarks were preceded by the Aquino government's summarily closing down of three radio stations for their alleged "anti-government" propaganda.

On the same day as Salonga was predicting martial law, Aquino herself, in a special meeting with loyal senators, called upon allied politicians to mobilize the ranks of the "people's power" organizations that had brought her to power, to rally around the government against the NPA and rebel troops. But after a year-and-a-half, the "people's power" popularity of the President has dissipated.

On Oct. 15, five thousand trade unionists waving red flags and lighted torches marched to the presidential palace demanding wage increases. The march, called by the pro-NPA May 1st Movement, is vowing a nationwide strike campaign to force through wage hikes, in the face of steep inflation in

prices of basic commodities, including rice, under the International Monetary Fund austerity the Aquino regime has imposed on the country. Speaking for a majority of the people who poured into the streets in February 1986 for Aquino, Roberto Ortaliz, secretary general of the May 1st Movement, told reporters, "It is now come to a state where we are diagonally opposite the government." Union leaders, representing 800,000 workers, predict that up to 2,000 firms will be closed nationwide.

Meanwhile, Aquino continues to zig-zag wildly on her "strategy" toward the NPA. At the beginning of October, she called for a full military offensive against the insurgency. However, this appears to have been less a shift toward a more active military stance against the NPA than an attempt to temporarily appease the restive military. On Oct. 13, the government called for new peace talks with the NPA through the NPA's political arm, the National Democratic Front. The talks are to lead to a ceasefire, covering the Christmas season through nationally held local elections Jan. 18. The NPA and its political affiliates would be given free rein to come into the nation's towns, cities, and villages to influence the elections through infiltration and/or terror.

Aquino's new attempt at appeasement with the NDF—the last ceasefire accomplished nothing save giving the NPA time for regroupment and propaganda—has come under public fire from the military. The talks offer "gave the impression that the government is already accommodating them," said one unidentified general quoted in the *Washington Times* Oct. 15. "People thought the government was supporting them [the NPA]."

The announcement has strained relations with the military even further, since the Aug. 28 attempted coup led by Col. "Gringo" Honason. When Aquino paid a surprise visit to the Bulacan Provincial Command Camp Oct. 15, her bodyguards disarmed the government troops before she arrived. Aquino has also rankled the military with her appointment of Raul Manglapus as foreign minister. Manglapus, a former exile in the United States, is on record as advocating the removal of the U.S. bases from the country.

Aquino's defiance of the military reality in her country is hurrying on new coup attempts, as rumors in Manila indicate. Nevertheless, as presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche pointed out in a statement Oct. 14, "The bets are, that if the next coup attempt fails, as it is expected to do, the result will be the establishment of martial law and a 'junta-style cabinet,' which runs the country, with Mrs. Aquino as a mere figurehead. If that occurs, then Moscow's logic comes into play; an Aquino martial law government sets the stage for a Soviet insurgency takeover of Manila, with various parts of the nation launching anti-communist civil wars for separatist independence against the central government." The alternative, LaRouche points out, is for Washington at last to permit Philippine patriots to settle their own affairs, without interference.