

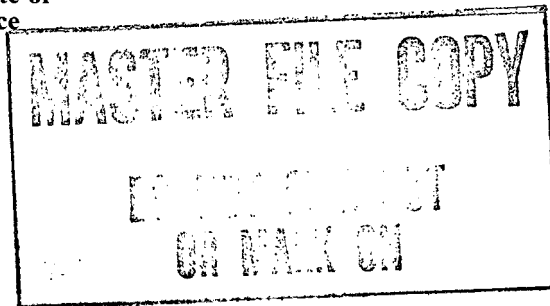


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The Communist Party of the Philippines: Organizing for Revolution



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A Research Paper

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The Communist Party of the Philippines: Organizing for Revolution

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A Research Paper

*Research for this report was completed
on 30 December 1981.*

This paper was prepared by [redacted]
Malaysia/Singapore/Islands Branch, Office of East
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queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief,
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**The Communist Party
of the Philippines:
Organizing for Revolution** [REDACTED]

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Overview

The 8,000-strong Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP/ML) has transformed itself during the past decade from a minor nuisance into a potentially serious security threat to the Marcos government. It has recovered from the disarray of the early 1970s, and its military arm is now active in 43 of the country's 72 provinces. The party leadership believes—with some justification—that the CPP/ML will be able to challenge the government by 1984. [REDACTED]

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Basic organizational changes and recent insurgent activity suggest that Mindanao may be the party's major target during the early 1980s. During the next few years, the party will concentrate on organizing a broad national front aimed at consolidating Marcos's opponents behind party efforts. US and other foreign business interests will be subjected to propaganda, and US companies in Mindanao could be especially vulnerable to any concentrated Communist drive. [REDACTED]

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Major problems may still prevent the party from realizing these ambitious goals:

- Decentralization to ensure survivability has led to a weak central leadership unable to control regional committees and coordinate any national program.
- Incipient friction between the party leadership from northern Luzon and groups from the south, where the party's major expansion is occurring.
- Lack of any external funding, which could constrain the party's expansion and recruitment efforts. [REDACTED]

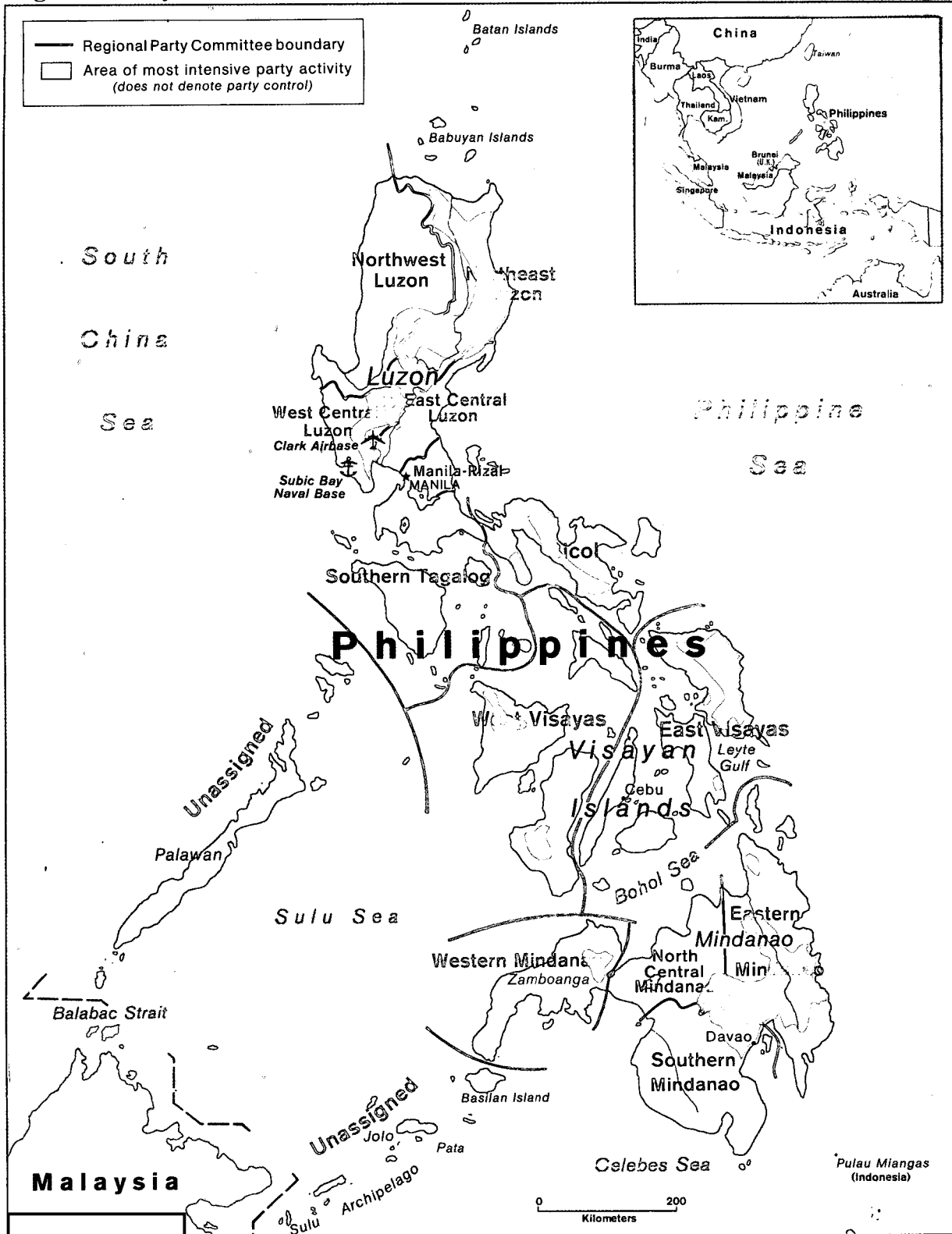
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The party could resolve these problems unless the Marcos government makes a concentrated effort to counter party attempts to attract the long-neglected rural population. [REDACTED]

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Figure 1
Regional Party Committees of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP/ML)



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The Communist Party of the Philippines: Organizing for Revolution [redacted]

Party Origins

The CPP/ML was spawned in the 1960s by a doctrinal split within the old-line, pro-Soviet Philippine Communist Party (PKP). The CPP/ML's founder, Jose Maria Sison, contended that the PKP was too willing to cooperate with the entrenched Filipino political elite and overemphasized organizing the urban workers. This quarrel was further exacerbated by a generational division, as Sison and other younger adherents were unable to advance in the party. Accusing the PKP of losing its dedication to revolution because of excessive legalism and rampant nepotism, Sison and his followers finally bolted from the PKP, forming the CPP/ML in December 1968. [redacted]

The CPP/ML membership today largely reflects Sison's initial following in the country's leading colleges and universities. In 1964, inspired by the example of Mao's Cultural Revolution, Sison created the Nationalist Youth (Kabataang Makabayan), a radical-left student organization that was in the forefront of the violent anti-Marcos and anti-US demonstrations that rocked Manila in the late 1960s. The Nationalist Youth had cadre on campuses throughout the country, although its center was in elite Manila universities such as the University of the Philippines and Ateneo de Manila—schools where the party continues to find sympathy and new recruits. Most of the party's present leaders acquired their experience with the Nationalist Youth or its several allied organizations. [redacted]

¹ The PKP was severely hurt by the split, which resulted in the loss of almost all its military arm, and by the 1972 imposition of martial law. By the mid-1970s, the PKP had accepted an amnesty from the government and now has a semilegal status. Confined mostly to the Manila area, the PKP has a limited following and its members seldom antagonize the Marcos government. [redacted]

This core of students was joined in the late 1960s by the bulk of the declining PKP's military arm, the Hukbalahap (Huks).² Led by Bernabe Buscayno (Commander Dante), the Huks were attracted by Sison's more activist program. The CPP/ML formed its own military arm—the New People's Army (NPA)—around Dante's Huks in 1969. [redacted]

The Current Leadership

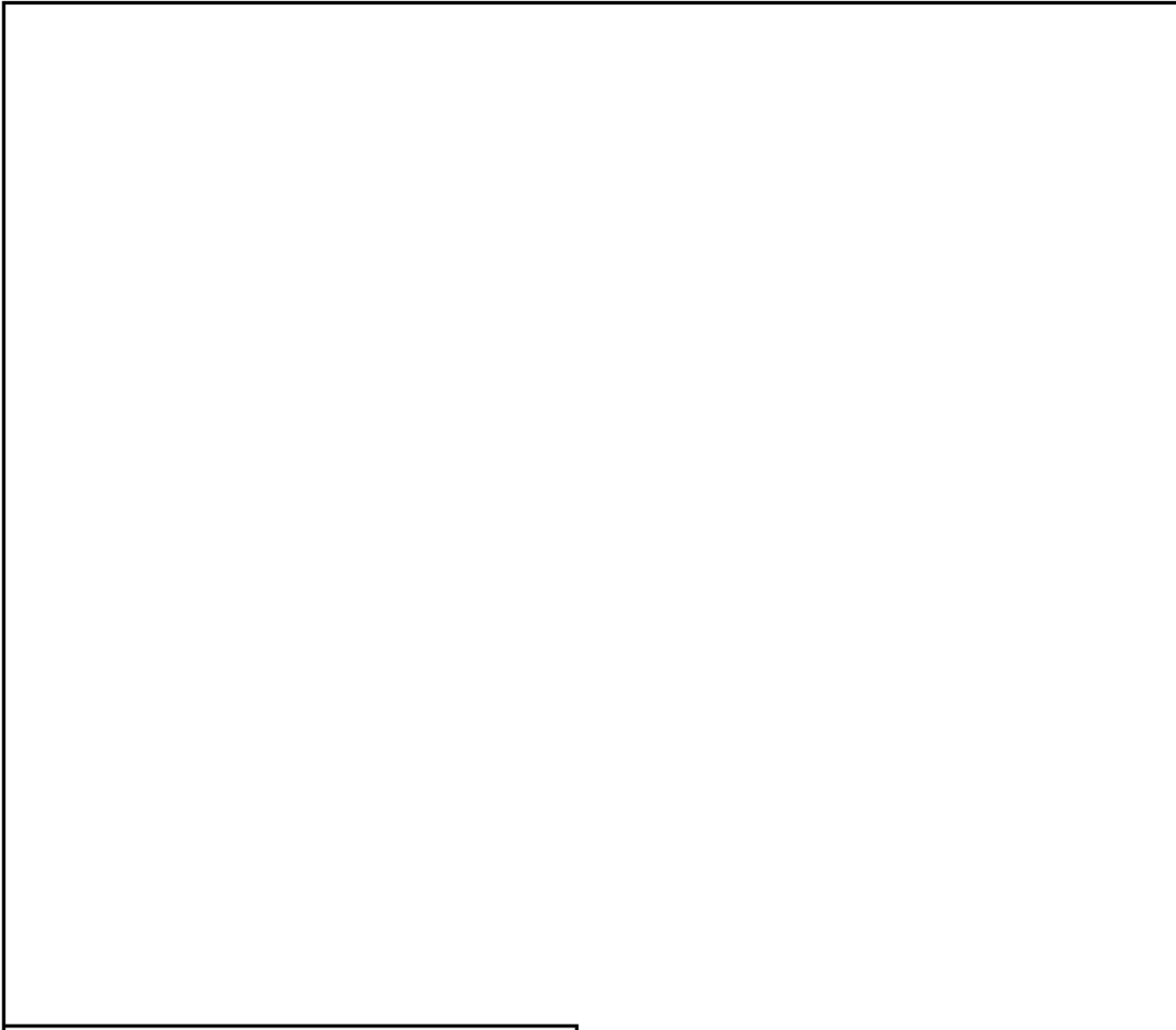
When Sison was captured in 1977, most of the original party leaders were already either dead or in prison. Sison's successors have rapidly expanded the CPP/ML in both numbers and geographical distribution. Party membership, for example, has grown from around 2,000 in 1970 to 8,000 in 1980. Moreover, since early 1980, the leadership has displayed a marked aggressiveness and willingness to challenge government military forces. CCP/ML activities, although uncoordinated to some extent, have become so worrisome to the Marcos government that troops have been transferred from the Muslim areas of Mindanao, where they have fought a decade-long war against Muslim separatists, to Samar and eastern Mindanao, where recent party/NPA inroads have been the most spectacular. [redacted]

In theory, the party is run by a 15- to 17-man Central Committee, which sends its directives to the 13 regional party committees for implementation. [redacted]

[redacted]

² The Huks represented the latest manifestation of the centuries-old Philippine tradition of armed peasant protest. The cry for land reform had attracted many poor farmers to its ranks in the late 1940s, and both Dante and his closest lieutenants were of peasant origin. Sison's emphasis on the primacy of rural areas in promoting the revolution thus filled a familiar niche and accounts for the party's apparent ease in developing rural support during the 1970s. Combined with student activists, the peasant guerrillas give the Marxist revolution a Filipino face. [redacted]

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The Central Committee is a young group. Almost all committee members are in their early or mid-30s, and none are over 50. Barring arrest or death, its members should be active for at least two decades and provide the continuity of policy and direction the party needs to "seize state power." A decade-long existence underground has also created a leadership that is both ruthless and pragmatic. Moreover, because of its isolation from potential foreign supporters, the current leadership is extremely self-reliant.

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Most of the Central Committee members have first-hand military experience. Some, like NPA chief Juanito Rivera, have assassinated government officials. This has blurred distinctions between civil and military roles among party leaders and facilitated party control of the insurgency. [redacted]

The party is directed by a triumvirate—Central Committee Chairman Rodolfo Salas, Military Commission head Juanito Rivera, and Secretary General Rafael Baylosis. All are members of both the party's

inner circle, the five-man Politburo, and the Central Committee. All are from the central Luzon area and personify the Tagalog/Ilocano dominance of the party leadership. [redacted]

[redacted] Whereas all three are apparently competent, the lack of a single unchallengeable leader probably has hurt efforts by the leadership to reassert its control over the regional party committees. [redacted]

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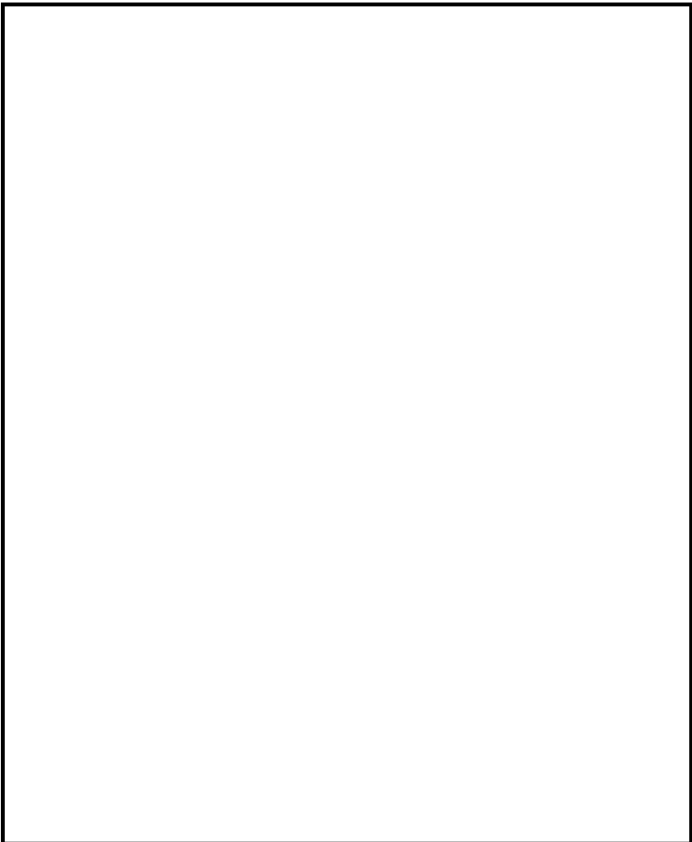
The Provincial Base

The party believes the path to power is through a rural-based insurgency, and it has concentrated its efforts in the provinces for more than a decade. The CPP/ML is now active in 43 of the country's 72 provinces, and in August 1980 it called for establishing more rural guerrilla bases. Urban organizing in the form of urban branches for each regional party committee occurs but is a low priority in party strategy. [redacted]

Besides dogma, the major impetus for the move to the provinces was the 1972 declaration of martial law. Before, the party was based mainly in Manila and to the north in an area of central Luzon traditionally controlled by the Huks. Government counterinsurgency measures following martial law forced the party leadership to abandon these areas. Since then, the party has expanded basically east and south. Manila and central Luzon have been relegated to the background, although they are the key to political success in the Philippines. [redacted]

The move to the provinces has strengthened the regional committees at the expense of the Central Committee. The constant turnover caused by numerous arrests of key cadre members in the early 1970s and disruptions forced by repeated movement to avoid capture broke down already tenuous intraparty links. As a result, the regional party committees—the pivotal units in the party structure linking local members with the party leadership—became virtually independent by the mid-1970s. [redacted]

The party's national leadership is trying unsuccessfully to minimize regional autonomy. It has little to offer regional party committees, which are financially and organizationally self-sufficient. An attempt in 1978 to use force failed. In that year the Central Committee launched a party rectification campaign after a serious internal dispute with the Manila-Rizal regional party committee. The Manila group, led by Central Committee member Filemon Lagman, challenged the party's anti-Soviet posture and its emphasis on a rural-based revolution. In turn, the party leadership charged Lagman and his associates with "rightist opportunism," demoted and later murdered him, and dissolved the regional committee. The leadership was



unable, however, to expand the impact of the rectification campaign beyond Manila-Rizal. No other regional leaders were challenged and the campaign ceased. [redacted]

Another outgrowth of the party's rural expansion is the change in the membership structure. With the party's shift toward the rural southern areas of the country, more non-Tagalog/Ilocano speakers are being recruited. This trend may eventually end the Tagalog/Ilocano domination of the party and produce a stronger grassroots structure. [redacted]

The party has also become more sophisticated about recruiting at the local level after a disastrous experience in the mid-1970s in the Bicol—the long peninsula southeast of Manila. The Tagalog/Ilocano organizers sent by the party apparently were too arrogant for the local population and the mobilization effort

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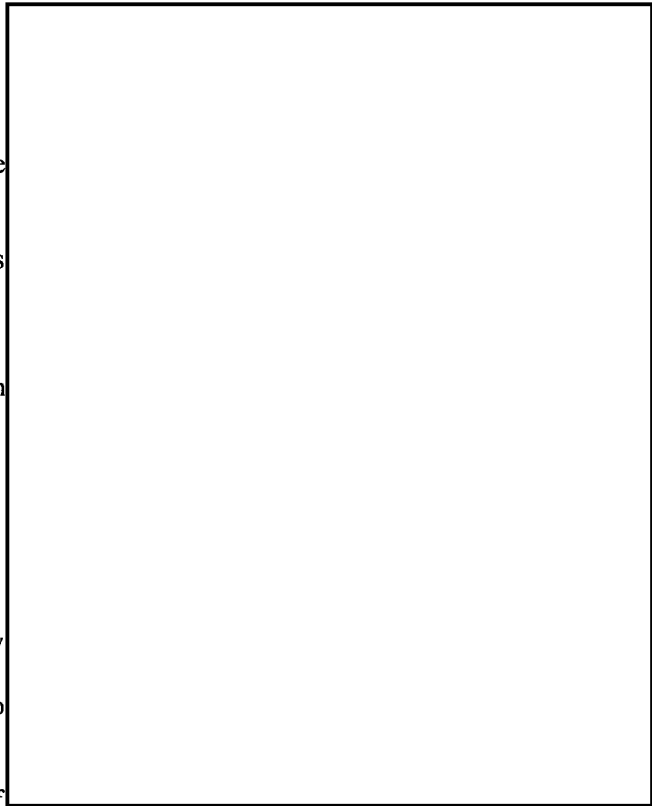
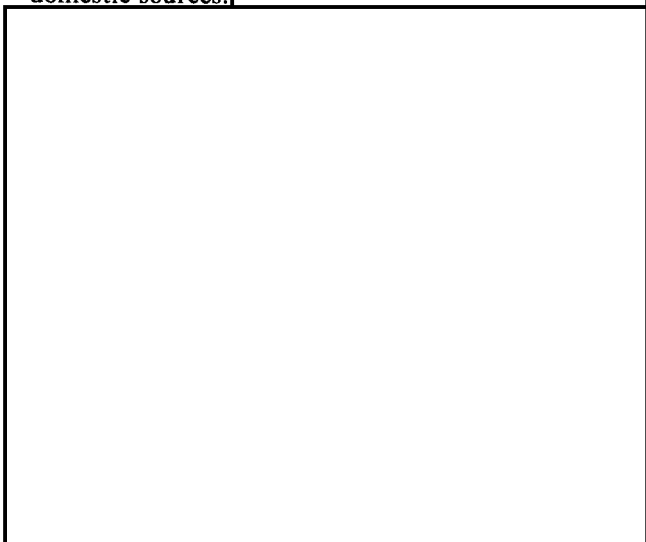
failed. Possessing only limited popular support, few local recruits, and even fewer weapons, the Bicol organizing committee then tried to stand against a major government military sweep in 1975. This resulted in a serious defeat, with survivors fleeing to the nearby island of Samar. [redacted]

Learning from its mistakes in the Bicol, the party has succeeded in greatly expanding its provincial base. The number of regional party committees has almost doubled to 13. Party resurgence is best demonstrated by its performance on Samar. From less than a dozen members in 1972, the Samar regional party now controls as many as 1,500 guerrillas. It succeeded in shocking the Marcos government in mid-1977 by temporarily seizing two towns in the roadless north-east area of the island. [redacted]

The party has nonetheless paid for its move to the provinces. The virtual autonomy of the regional party committees makes a coordinated nationwide effort very difficult. The national leadership must devote too much time and effort strengthening its position vis-a-vis the regional committees. Thus, although decentralization has allowed the party to take advantage of local opportunities to expand, it has also prevented the party from realizing its potential as a political force with national appeal and impact. [redacted]

Financing the Revolution

The party finances its activities almost entirely from domestic sources. [redacted]



Reliance on domestic financing, while ensuring national party independence, has its drawbacks. Because funds are generated locally and most of the money remains at the regional level, the national party leadership is resource short. Financially independent regional party committees can, therefore, safely ignore any national leadership directive they dislike without fear of serious reprisals. [redacted]

Party funds are—by their method of collection—tied to control of specific areas. If government operations force the local party to relinquish that control, the loss will have a definite impact. Furthermore, regional committee reliance on locally generated funding makes any nationwide campaign difficult to implement. Until fund collection and distribution is centralized at the national level, the CPP/ML will find it difficult to unite its regional enclaves. [redacted]

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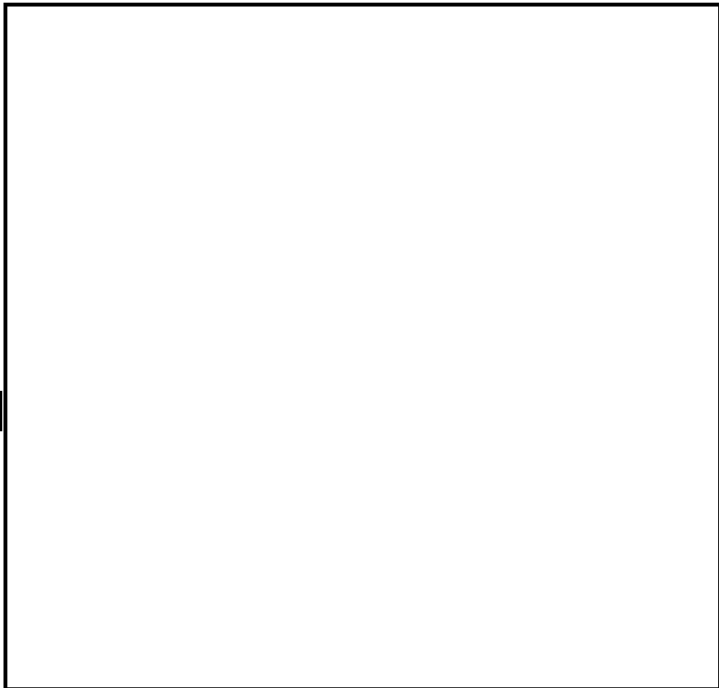
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The party wisely appears to be seeking supplemental funding that is not tied to control of specific areas. One new source appears to be the national front movement, which party cadres are now trying to infiltrate and control. If successful, the front would give the party money collected from a variety of national rather than regional groups. Moreover, because the Central Committee directly controls the party's efforts to create a Communist-dominated national front, this source of funds would be held by the national leadership and thus provide some leverage with recalcitrant regional party committees. [redacted]

Taking the Nationalist Line

Party interest in developing a broad anti-Marcos national front is longstanding. The second party plenum in September 1970 recognized the need to establish a mass base of support by linking with nonparty groups also opposed to the Marcos government. By late 1971, a preparatory commission was established under Central Committee auspices to initiate the program. Party cadre members were instructed to contact sympathizers among Christian activists, Muslim secessionists, students, and even anti-Marcos rightwing nationalist groups. Martial law disrupted these efforts, which had achieved limited progress only among Christian activists. Senior party officials involved in front work were arrested and the party, under constant pressure from the authorities, was unable to pursue the front idea. Instead of becoming the driving force behind the anti-Marcos movement, the party was reduced to trying to attach itself to the more popular non-Communist groups. [redacted]

Sison, dissatisfied with the progress of the armed struggle, resurrected the national front program in May 1977. Despite Sison's arrest later in the year, the preparatory commission remained active, taking advantage of the somewhat relaxed climate surrounding the April 1978 parliamentary elections. Since then, the national front has occupied an increasingly important place in party planning. [redacted]



In the current period of increasing domestic political polarization, the party views the Natdems as its best vehicle for capturing the anti-Marcos movement. More moderate political figures are either courted or, if unresponsive, attacked. For example, the leading Marcos opponent—exiled former senator Benigno Aquino—has been characterized in Natdem publications as a “reconciliationist” and “collaborator” under “US imperialist” influence.⁴ Some non-Communist groups that do not belong to the front are dismissed in Natdem publications as CIA creations. Moreover, the government has inadvertently played into the party's hands. Its continuing refusal to treat the moderate opposition with anything less than contempt only undermines the moderates and further assists the Natdems. [redacted]

The party is also using the Natdems to play on nationalism, a powerful theme in 20th century Philippine history. Often translated into anti-American and/or anti-Japanese sentiment, nationalism allows those dissatisfied with Marcos to believe that the Philippines can blame foreigners for its problems. Where Filipinos might not respond to a Communist [redacted]

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appeal, nationalism could prove to be a more effective lure. Thus the party, through the Natdems, seeks to lead a united front against the US-Marcos dictatorship rather than call for revolution. The country's worsening economy and the policy reforms that the World Bank and the IMF want Manila to introduce fan nationalist fires, especially in the economically depressed southern part of the country where the party is most active. [redacted]

1,500 full-time guerrillas, is now [redacted] anywhere from 5,000 to 10,000 regulars. [redacted]

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Because so many of the regional party members command NPA units, party control is virtually total. At the national level, NPA activities come under the loose direction of the Central Committee, which oversees the military commission headed by Rivera. [redacted]

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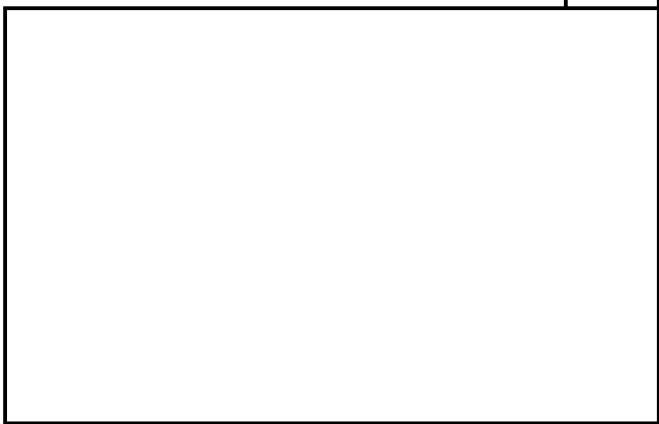
The party's nationalist line is its channel to the younger generation of political leaders. Although the party leadership, especially under Sison, dealt with the country's old-line political leaders, it realizes the best prospects for influencing nonparty groups lie in the long term. Indeed several moderate opposition politicians have stated that they are becoming irrelevant as their younger colleagues are attracted to more radical solutions. Natdem acceptability among anti-Marcos opponents rose appreciably in June 1981, when the moderates joined the Front in boycotting the presidential election [redacted]

A similar organizational structure exists at the regional party committee level and lower. Guerrilla fronts are subordinate to the regional party committees and none appear to be organized across regional committee boundaries. While troops may be moved from area to area, major commanders apparently are not. There is no evidence of any multifront operation involving more than one regional authority. As a result, the insurgency has a brushfire character [redacted]

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The Front provides the party with new recruits. The party has been able to recruit promising students, for example, by monitoring their performance and commitment as members of the League of Filipino Students and the Youth for Nationalism and Democracy. Similar front groups exist in the labor movement and among Christian activists. In more strongly CPP/ML influenced rural areas, party front groups have been able to organize substantial portions of the peasantry, but have been unable to attract more than a handful of Muslim adherents. Despite increased emphasis on the national front strategy, Natdem-sponsored demonstrations remain relatively small by Philippine standards; only 1,500 persons were involved in a demonstration in Manila last October [redacted]



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Aside from the opportunities presented by the Natdems, the NPA offers the best field for party recruitment. From the party's perspective, control of the insurgency is paramount to party success and requires placing and maintaining officials in responsible positions. The relatively rapid growth of the insurgency since 1977—in terms of both personnel and geographic extent—combined with the greater number of

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The Military Arm

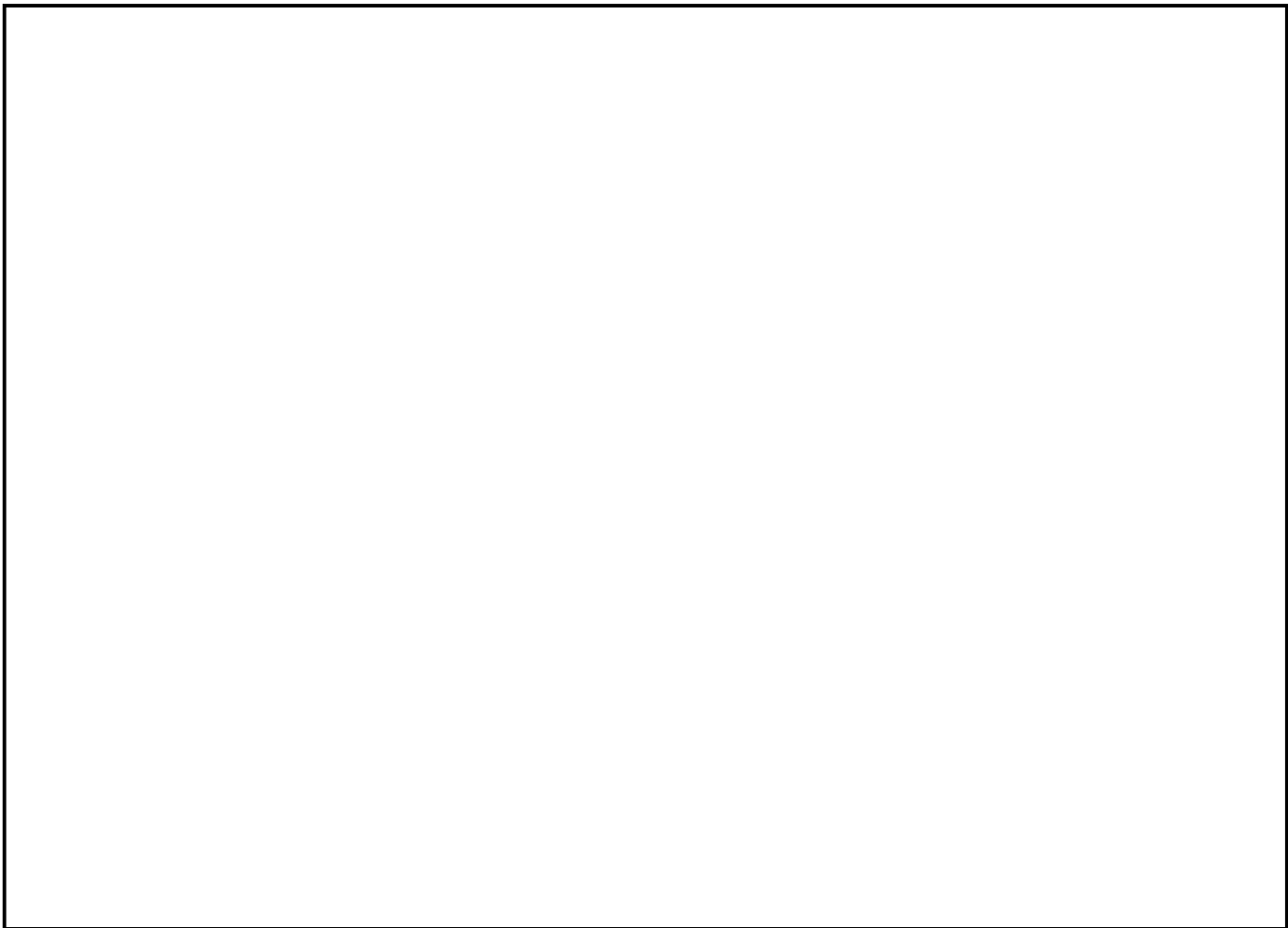
Over the past decade, the New People's Army has evolved into a respectable military force that in recent months has hesitated little in initiating combat with government forces. Armed strength, originally around

⁵ This paper does not directly address the military aspects of the NPA insurgency. A forthcoming paper from the Office of East Asian Analysis will examine recent developments in both the Communist and Muslim insurgencies and the government's policies for dealing with them. [redacted]

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clashes with the Philippine military, places heavy demands on the party's still limited manpower pool. By screening possible recruits through the NPA, the party can fill the need for competent, dedicated personnel and maintain its hold on the military arm of the revolution. [redacted]

At the same time, the growing number of insurgent leaders drawn from the southern provinces probably will weaken the impact and influence of the old Huk core, who basically represent the Tagalog/Ilocano dominance of the party. As these Huks are eclipsed in number by newer recruits, the NPA will move away from its central Luzon heritage and more accurately reflect the Philippines' regional diversity. The party could then become even more regionalized. Conversely, continued introduction of non-Tagalog/Ilocano

speakers could give the party a more national image, and allow the party to better present itself as a legitimate protector of rural Filipinos from an Ilocano-dominated military and political regime. [redacted]

Despite its recent growth, the NPA is still achieving only limited success. It has been unable to create a liberated zone, although it has come close in Samar and may succeed there sometime in the next several years. With the party leadership entirely in the country, it needs the secure base a liberated zone would provide to better coordinate party activities. A liberated zone would also enhance the party's claim to be an effective alternative to the Marcos government. The most serious obstacle to creating a zone is the government's growing commitment against the insurgency. [redacted]

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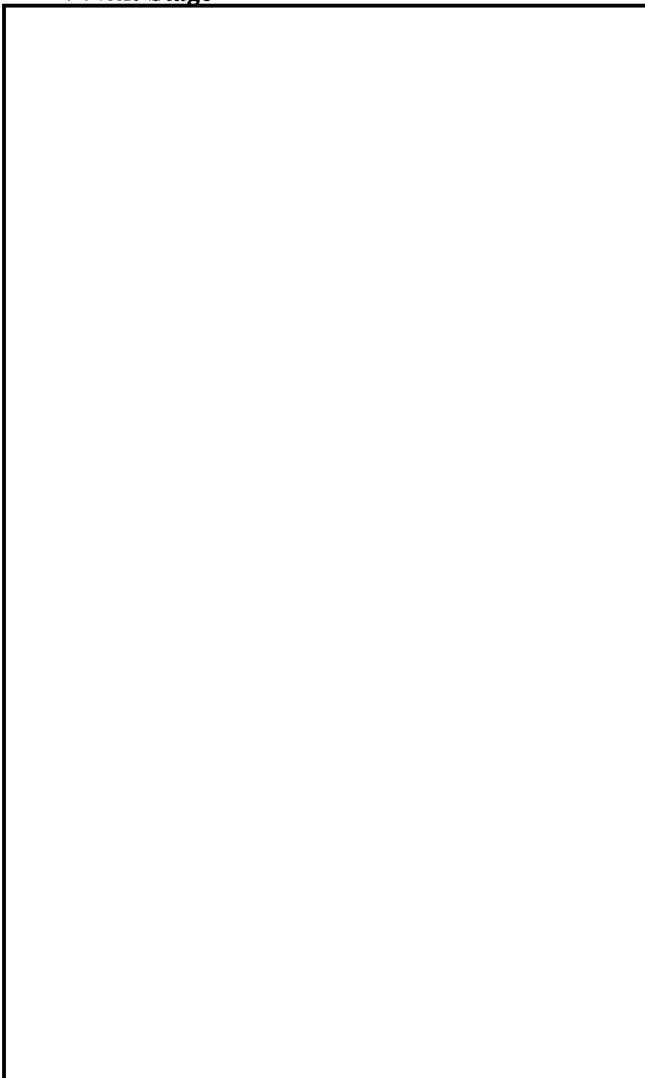
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The Next Stage



Another potential problem is financing. The party's forced reliance on domestic sources for funding and weapons may undercut the pace of expansion [redacted]



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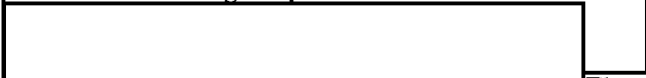
[redacted] Although it has major internal problems, it has functioned and grown without meeting any serious obstacles. Failure to resolve these problems will at the worst delay the 1984 target for challenging the government. Any delay could give the Marcos government the time needed to recoup lost ground, specifically the opportunities squandered in the 1970s, to neutralize the party when it was weak. However, if the government continues to offer only ill-managed and ineffective social programs, or increases its reliance on a military approach, the party may have time to overcome its own internal shortcomings. [redacted]

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Targeting Mindanao

Mindanao appears to be the most likely area for success of the Program. [redacted]

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The rising number of NPA incidents over the last year further underscores this impression. Next to the central Luzon plains, resource-rich Mindanao is probably the most attractive area for party operations. Government presence is minimal in what is still a frontier. The domination of most of the island's economic and political institutions by immigrants from the central Visayan islands, where many areas are already under party influence, gives the party a net of family and other ties that increase the prospects for successful penetration [redacted]

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An expansion of the party may trigger several incipient problems. As the party incorporates more members from its remote rural areas, the dominance of urbanized, middle class, ex-students may come under increasing challenge. Peasant-student divisions among the leadership have been present since the outset, and while a severe intraparty rift appears to have been avoided, continued rural expansion may create more pressure in this area. [redacted]

The presence in southwest Mindanao of a well-armed Muslim guerrilla force is also attractive to the party, although the Muslim insurgent leaders have refused to coordinate their efforts in any substantial way with

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the NPA. Some low-level cooperation has been reported. If a working alliance with the Muslims could be forged, it would open the possibility of an external supply route (via Sabah, Malaysia) for the first time in the party's existence. The chance to coordinate military operations against government forces too small and too overextended to deal with both insurgencies at once offers greater possibilities. This has been the fear of government security officials for years and the party may be better able to pursue such a development

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