

# The Federation of Free Farmers and Its Significance in the History of the Philippine Peasant Movement

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## Abstract

On June 9, 2002, Jeremias U. Montemayor, the founder and supreme leader of the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) for half a century, passed away. The FFF was formed in 1953 when the communist-led peasant movement was defeated; it became the most dominant peasant organization in the 1960s; and it had remained one of the most influential until his death.

This article focuses on the FFF which can be considered to have been the most significant moderate organization of the Philippine peasant movement that emerged after the 1950s. It analyses the FFF's characteristics in terms of the specialized patron-client model instead of the class model which has usually been employed in studying peasant organizations. Based on the analysis, the paper also discusses the historical significance of the FFF and tries to present a new perspective of the history of the Philippine peasant movement from the 1950s to the 1990s.

**Keywords:** The Federation of Free Farmers, peasant movement, peasant organization, rural organization, Philippine history, Philippine politics

## I Introduction

The formation of the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) in the early 1950s was an epoch-making event in the development of the Philippine peasant movement: it was not only important to the peasant movement itself, but would also result in a significant change in the way the history of the Philippine peasant movement was viewed. The importance of the latter point, however, has not been fully recognized.

It has been widely held that, with the 1930s as a turning point, the historical process of the Philippine peasant movement shifted from peasant rebellion with a traditional religious or supernatural character to a well organized, class-conscious, secular peasant movement [Sturtevant 1958; 1962; 1976].<sup>1)</sup> A peasant movement arises out of economic and

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1) For example, Kerkvliet [1971: 172-176, 198-200] and Constantino [1975]. This historical view was disseminated by David R. Sturtevant who studied numerous peasant uprisings that broke out in the hundred years from 1840 to 1940 in a broad historical context, tracing them back to the transformation of the colonial society under Spanish and, later, American rule.

political factors such as poverty and oppression intertwined with social and cultural stresses. It manifests itself in different forms depending on historical circumstances. The numerous peasant uprisings that occurred across the Philippines before the 1930s were characterized by religious, millennial overtones and revolved around a personality cult of their leader. They were geographically limited and often short-lived, put down easily by the colonial state authorities. From the 1930s, with the Sakdal movement as the watershed, these forms of peasant movements were replaced by the socialist- and the communist-led movements. The Sakdal movement was regarded as a transitional form of peasant movement since it had a tendency to worship its leader, Benigno Ramos, as a hero but also had clearly defined secular objectives, notably the attainment of immediate independence from American rule and the redistribution of wealth.

It may be noted that Sturtevant suggested the resurgence of supernaturalism after the 1950s, citing the example of the Lapiang Malaya [Sturtevant 1976: 256–266]. Also, Reynaldo C. Ileto sought to uncover the logic and framework behind the popular movements from 1840 to 1910 as well as the Lapiang Malaya in terms of the perception of the masses themselves, and revealed that those peasant uprisings which had been described as mystic, irrational and even fanatic were in fact emanating from a coherent view of their world [Ileto 1979]. Nevertheless, the view that the dominant types of peasant movements after the 1930s were secular and based on class consciousness has been rarely challenged, giving an impression that the historical process from then to the present is basically a direct extension of such movements.

However, the FFF, a moderate peasant movement, which emerged in the 1950s and reached its peak in the 1960s, does not appear to follow this pattern. Organized by professionals such as lawyers and intellectuals after the communist-led peasant uprising had lost its momentum, the FFF sought harmony, instead of conflict, among the classes. Also, a certain extent of religious influence is seen in the FFF, as Catholic social teaching inspired its ideological foundation and priests, nuns and seminarians have been involved in its organization and activity. Furthermore, from around 1970, moderate organizations more or less similar to the FFF began to proliferate, while a class-struggle type peasant movement was restored under the reconstructed Communist Party.

Against the above-stated background, this paper intends to examine the historical significance of the FFF by analyzing its ideology, aims, platform, and activities as well as its organization. At the same time, the paper will present another way of looking at the history of the Philippine peasant movement from the 1950s to the 1990s.

The following argument consists of four parts. Section II provides a background of the FFF's formation, to be followed by an analysis of the characteristic features of the FFF in Section III. Section IV divides the period from the 1950s to the 1990s into four sub-periods (from the 1950s to the late 1960s, from the late 1960s to the declaration of martial law in 1972, from 1972 to the people power revolution of 1986, and from 1986 to the 1990s), and describes the development of the peasant movement with a focus on the FFF

in each sub-period. Section V then concludes this study.

## II Background of the Formation of the Federation of Free Farmers

As the communist-led peasant movement that had organized the Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan (HMB) or People's Army of Liberation and staged an armed rebellion was mostly crushed by the government forces, the FFF was launched in 1953 as an entirely different peasant movement and began to fill the vacuum created by the collapse of the former. To understand the background of the formation of the FFF, it will be necessary to survey briefly the communist-led peasant movement from its emergence and growth to the failed attempt to stage an armed revolution.

The most important cause behind the communist-led peasant movement was the pattern of landownership where agricultural lands were concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of big landlords and the majority of the peasants were their tenants. Emerging during the Spanish colonial period, this landownership pattern continued to intensify throughout the American and the Commonwealth periods. In Central Luzon, where the Huks were most active, the ratio of tenant farmers to the total population was especially high. In terms of the total number of tenant-operated farms as a percentage of all farms, the 1939 census placed four of the five provinces in the region above 50%, with Pampanga province having the national highest ratio of 70.4%, while Pangasinan, the northernmost province of the region, registering at 33.1% [Kerkvliet 1979: 24]. Most tenant farmers were sharecroppers, and the predominant sharecropping arrangement was fifty-fifty. Unlike lease holders who paid a fixed rent, the sharecroppers had to hand over half of their harvest. This type of sharecropping was helpful when the harvest was poor, but was a disincentive to efforts to increase production. Nonetheless, even under these conditions, the traditional landlord-tenant relationship, characterized as paternalistic patron-client ties, maintained the social order in farming villages and large-scale peasant unrest did not spread until the 1930s.

During the American colonial period, however, this traditional landlord-tenant relationship was gradually undermined mainly in the rice-producing plain of Central Luzon, due to the commercialization and mechanization of agriculture, growing absentee landlordism, and a rise in population. All these put communities under intense stress, and helped create an environment where class-based solidarity among peasants could develop.<sup>2)</sup> By 1919, a tenants' union called Union de Aparceros de Filipinas (UAF) was formed. The organization expanded and later renamed the Katipunag Pambansa ng mga Magbubukid sa Pilipinas (KPMP) or the National Society of Peasants in the Philippines in 1924 [Saulo 1990: 8]. When the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP) or the Philippine

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2) For the most standard explanation of this process, see Kerkvliet [1979].

Communist Party was established by leaders of the radical labor movement in 1930, the KPMP joined it as one of its mass organizations. In 1932, the Socialist Party of the Philippines (SPP) was also founded by Pedro Abad Santos, which then proceeded to set up the Aguman ding Maldang Talapagobra (AMT) or the General Workers' Union as a peasants' organization. As these organizations expanded, it was around this time that disputes between landlords and peasants in Central Luzon intensified.

The PKP and the SPP merged under the former's name in 1938 against a backdrop of rising international tensions. The KPMP and the AMT, in turn, formed the Hukbalahap (Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon or the People's Anti-Japanese Army, renamed Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan in 1950) under the leadership of the PKP in 1942 to fight the Japanese invasion and occupation. The Huks not only fought bravely against Japanese troops, but also virtually carried out their land reforms in Central Luzon after the landlords took refuge in the cities during the war. After Japan's defeat, the Philippine government dominated by the landed elites came back to restore the old order. The Huks stood by the peasants and opposed this move, escalating their confrontation with the government and landlords. The government outlawed the Huks in 1948. The Huks embarked on an armed struggle under the leadership of the PKP to bring about a revolution, and advanced as far as to gain control over Central Luzon around 1950. However, the Philippine government, with military and economic assistance from the United States, successfully put down the Huk rebellion by means of large-scale military operations combined with a policy of attraction. In 1954, Luis Taruc, the supreme commander of the HMB, surrendered and practically ended the civil war.<sup>3)</sup> It was under these circumstances that the FFF was formed.

The FFF was founded in 1953 by Jeremias U. Montemayor, who remained the highest leader of the organization for almost 50 years until he passed away in 2002. It would be impossible to discuss the FFF without making reference to Montemayor. He was born on January 24, 1923 into a wealthy landowning family in Alaminos, Pangasinan. When he was 13 years old, his mother enrolled him at the Mary Help of Christians Minor Seminary run by the Society of the Divine Word (SDV) Fathers in Binmaley, Pangasinan to start his studies for the priesthood. Two years later, he transferred to the Jesuit-run San Jose Seminary in Calocan.<sup>4)</sup> After three years of training at these two seminaries, however, he realized that he did not like the life of a priest. He left the seminary and entered a high school to take some subjects and units required for a high school diploma. Montemayor subsequently enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts, Ateneo de Manila, a university also

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3) The factual account of the development of the communist-led peasant movement in this section is based mainly on Saulo [1990].

4) Montemayor later wrote that he considered the training he had received in the two seminaries as the best, most basic and most solid part and foundation of his entire education, and that he had never received such a strong, comprehensive, and completely satisfying grounding in his Catholic faith and religion [Montemayor 2003: 53–54].

run by the Jesuits. During his college days, he was particularly impressed with the social teachings of the Catholic Church given by Fr. Walter Hogan, and found the teachings highly motivating. His encounter with that priest had a significant influence on him to form the FFF a few years later. Graduating with Bachelor of Arts, *summa cum laude* in 1948, Montemayor entered the Ateneo College of Law, where he obtained his Bachelor of Laws, *magna cum laude* in 1952 [Republic of the Philippines 1979: 210; Guevarra 1987: 1, 6].<sup>5)</sup>

Soon after his graduation and shortly before he took up review classes in preparation for the bar examination, Montemayor had an experience that led him to involve himself in the peasant movement. In his hometown of Alaminos as well as in other towns, disputes between landlords and peasants occurred frequently at that time. His family also had tenancy problems. He became involved in the disputes at the request of his mother and began to visit her tenants. This made him interested in the lives of peasants. When his mother succeeded to remove her tenants whom she no longer needed since she had bought a tractor, Montemayor saw that their situation was very sad, and made up his mind to help the peasants. He even would side with them in their court case to resist the ejection against his mother. This was in 1952.<sup>6)</sup>

From around that time, Montemayor began to hold a series of meetings with peasants and to organize them starting from his hometown. He also sought the support of the people from Ateneo de Manila, particularly Fr. Hogan and the staff of the Institute of Social Order (ISO). Montemayor being a son of a landlord, it was initially difficult for him to win the trust of the peasants, but with the presence of Fr. Hogan in the meetings their confidence in the youthful organizer soon grew. The ISO, which was established by the Jesuit priest in 1947 to disseminate Catholic social doctrine and apply it to community problems [Youngblood 1990: 3–4], was giving moral support and advice to various labor unions belonging to the Federation of Free Workers (FFW), a labor federation formed by Juan C. Tan with Fr. Hogan as its adviser in 1950 [Fabros 1988: 36–38]. Having concentrated on unionization of industrial workers in the first few years, the FFW began to take interest in the peasantry. When Montemayor was lecturing at the Labor and Management School of the ISO, he met Fernando Esguerra who was then the FFW representative assigned to organize tenants in Central Luzon. The two found many of their interests to be mutual and they mapped out plans for the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) [Cater 1959: 3–4]. The name of the new organization was proposed by Fr. Hogan. The FFF was

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5) After Montemayor left the seminary, he had felt something lacking in his chest. Upon graduation from high school, he enrolled in the College of Liberal Arts and then the College of Law because he could study freely and eventually choose his line of specialization. Cited from the author's interview with Jeremias U. Montemayor (11 June 1994) in Quezon City. Also see Montemayor [2003: 50–65].

6) Montemayor found that which he was looking for to fill the vacuum in his chest. Cited from the author's interview with Jeremias U. Montemayor (11 June 1994) in Quezon City.

allowed to use some space as its head office in the premises of Ateneo de Manila then located in Padre Faura, and held its official inaugural ceremony in San Fernando, Pampanga on the Feast of Christ The King, 25 October 1953.

### III Characteristic Features of the FFF

The FFF's ideology, aims, platform, activities, and organizational characteristics are quite different from those of the communist-led peasant movement. In his article, "The Federation of Free Farmers," published in 1955, Montemayor argued that the root of the country's social, economic and political problems lay in the poverty of the peasants, which, in turn, was a result of the fact that they had been merely tenants and had to look up to a landlord as their master. The peasants were at a disadvantage in almost every thing — except numbers. And herein lay their hope. If they were properly organized, nothing could withstand their strength to improve their lot or to protect their rights. Then, Montemayor enumerated what a peasants' organization could do: it could be a weapon of common defense, and serve as a bridge between government and people, as an instrument for agrarian peace, as a means for economic advancement of the peasants, and as a voice to protect their interests in government action [Montemayor 1955: 373–378]. Montemayor envisioned the family-size farm as the paramount objective of the FFF. By giving every peasant a family-size farm of such area and fertility as would provide him and his family a decent livelihood, the problems of the peasantry would be solved from the roots. (To Montemayor, the nationalization of farm land, as was the case in the communist countries, meant simply that all farmers became tenants tied to a single giant landlord, the state.<sup>7)</sup> He thought that this objective could be achieved in either or both of two ways: (a) by the settlement of public agricultural lands; (b) by the expropriation and subdivision of landed estates. Despite all the obstacles, Montemayor believed that, peasants, once united and organized, could wield overwhelming political power to plan and apply such reforms to promote the well-being and the interests of the majority. He called this a democratic, peaceful revolution [*ibid.*: 387–389].

The constitution of the FFF adopted in November 1956, which well reflected its characteristic features, set out its aims and purposes in the 13 sections of Article II:

Section 1. To unite and organize all the small farmers throughout the Philippines.

Section 2. To act as a weapon of common defense for its members.

Section 3. To serve as an instrument of peace between its members and other groups, particularly between tenants and landlords.

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<sup>7)</sup> Cited from the author's interview with Jeremias U. Montemayor (11 June 1994) in Quezon City.

- Section 4. To act as a bridge to bring the government and the people closer to each other.
- Section 5. To provide an effective voice in the government for its members by enlightened and united action.
- Section 6. To act as a medium of information and education for its members.
- Section 7. To teach and encourage its members to adopt improved methods of production, and to organize cooperatives.
- Section 8. To promote democracy and freedom; to check communist infiltration and subversion.
- Section 9. To exert effort to the end that every farmer will own at least a decent home and a home lot.
- Section 10. To promote understanding, cooperation, and coordination between the Federation and other groups here and abroad.
- Section 11. To call upon other organizations and individuals to extend material and other aid to the members of the Federation.
- Section 12. To acquaint other groups of the conditions and problems of the members and to promote good public relations.
- Section 13. To promote in any way the physical, material and spiritual well-being of its members. [FFF 1956b]<sup>8)</sup>

Although the FFF's objectives of organizing peasants and protecting their interests (Sections 1 and 2) do not make it different from the communist-led peasant movement, the FFF explicitly distinguishes itself from the latter with its advocacy for an anti-communist liberal democracy (Section 8). It is clear that the FFF is not characterized by a class struggle, since it calls for peace between tenants and landlords (Section 3). Neither does the FFF aim for a revolution, since it aspires to serve as a bridge between the government and the people (Section 4). Providing an effective voice in the government for its members by enlightened and united action (Section 5) is simply an attempt to exercise political influence by peaceful and legitimate means rather than by violent and extralegal action.

The organizational structure of the FFF also has distinctive features. The highest decision-making organ of the FFF is the National Policy Board (NPB), which has the authority to formulate national policies for the Federation. In 1956 when the Board was inaugurated, it had a total of 14 members, including Montemayor (president), Fernando Esguerra (vice-president), Reynald Alcantara (secretary-general), and Fr. Hector Mauri (advisor) [Cater 1959: 30]. According to the FFF constitution adopted in 1956, these original members of the Board were permanent and could not be removed except by

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8) In 1973, another section was inserted: Section 13. To engage in rural banking and own stocks in rural banks for the benefit of its members; the original Section 13 was made Section 14 [FFF Undated-f, 21 October 1973].

death, incapacity, resignation or expulsion by other permanent members [FFF 1956b: Article V, Section 2]. The constitution was so amended in 1962 that the Board members shall be elected every year by a national convention to be composed of delegates from the provincial associations [FFF Undated-d, 1962: 4; FFF 1988: Article V, Section 2]. The Board members elect from among themselves President, Vice-President(s), Secretary-General, and other officers, who constitute the National Executive Office (NEXO) [FFF 1956b: Article VI, Sections 1, 2 and 3; FFF 1988: Article V, Section 4]. The NEXO executes the policies formulated by the Board.

The overall structure of the FFF, as most other national organizations, is pyramidal starting from the national level to the village level. The smallest organizational unit is the Barrio or Hacienda Local; all Barrio or Hacienda Locals in one municipality or central constitute a Municipal or Central Chapter; all Municipal or Central Chapters in one province constitute a Provincial Association; all Provincial Associations, in turn, constitute the Federation. What is noteworthy is that the national leadership (especially Montemayor until his death) wields overwhelming power in the decision-making process from important policy planning to its implementation and in major personnel affairs, and that this characteristic has remained basically the same from its formative stage until now. The FFF constitution provides that the National Policy Board “can exercise all the powers granted to all the lower bodies and offices whenever, in special cases, it wants to” [FFF 1988: Article V, section 1] and that, in any matter of local organizations which is not provided for, the decision shall lie in the National Executive Office [FFF 1956b: Article X, Section 7; FFF 1988: Article X, Section 7].

These facts indicate that the authority of the national leadership does not necessarily rely on the confidence of the rank and file members of the Federation but stems from the ability of the former to satisfy the needs of the latter. In reacting to a criticism that, despite its advocacy of democracy, the FFF was not democratic because the leaders were self-appointed, Montemayor once responded, “As the organizers of the FFF we constituted ourselves its first set of national officers. . . . Then we went to the people and explained what we intended to do. . . . They were free to join our membership or not. If they joined, we considered that fact a vote of confidence in our leadership” [Montemayor 1960: 423–424].<sup>9)</sup> This point is also reflected in its constitution which has provisions concerning the qualifications of the FFF membership and leadership.

The membership of the FFF is restricted to peasants, and anyone who regularly has tenants or employees in connection with any agricultural or fishing enterprise is disqualified from becoming a member of the Federation [FFF 1956b: Article III, Section 1; FFF 1988: Article III, Section 1]. To become an official or leader of the FFF, however, one

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9) This statement in effect can also mean that those members who do not like the leadership are free to leave the Federation. In fact, no disciplinary action has been taken against those members who left the organization for doing so.



needs not be qualified for the membership. On the other hand, those who have become officers or leaders are automatically accepted as members of the Federation [FFF 1956b: Article IX; FFF 1988: Article IX]. In other words, the FFF officers or leaders do not have to be peasants. In fact, lawyers and other professionals from the landowning class, including Montemayor, have occupied most of the critical leadership positions of the Federation, and the leaders with a peasant background are limited.<sup>10)</sup> *Towards a Filipino Ideology*, a book published by the FFF in 1972, contains an interesting passage which gives an explanation for this phenomenon.

Although they comprise the vast majority of the people, the peasants and the workers, by themselves alone, cannot at present adequately educate, organize, and defend themselves; much less can they alone bring about the various reforms needed by the nation. They need the help and cooperation of other groups, who also need them in return.

Logically and historically, the peasants and the workers have been in need of the help of intellectuals who understand and sympathize with their cause, their problems and their aspirations. Because of their difficult life, the peasants and the workers spend practically all their time producing and procuring food and other necessities. They have neither the sufficient time nor the adequate training to systematically reflect on their problems, crystallize their concepts and impressions, explicate their aspirations, and trace them to their philosophical roots and ultimate implications. Much less can the peasants and the workers by themselves relate their situations to that of the whole nation since they have neither the time nor the opportunity to know intimately the situation of the other sectors of Philippine society. They need the intellectuals for these. . . .

The peasants and the workers need the help of the professionals, at least at the start of their movement for liberation and development. Among the professionals most needed by the peasants are teachers who would help them realize their situation, problems, opportunities, rights, and duties; lawyers who would handle their cases in court; business managers and accountants to help them start their cooperatives. [FFEF 1972: 70-71]

This leader-member relationship in the organization of the FFF may be called "specialized patron-client relationship." Comparison with some other types of relationships, namely, traditional clientelism, professional-client relations and those in the class-based organizations, in terms of similarities and differences will help clarify its nature. While the traditional patron-client relationship between landlords and tenants is a social relationship in which multi-faceted exchanges of value are involved, the FFF's leader-member relationship is more or less specialized in agrarian matters. The specialized

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10) In 1972, the FFF constitution was amended to assure two-thirds of the NPB members and one-half of the NEXO members come from the peasant class as per the criteria approved by the NPB [FFF Undated-f, 6 December 1972].

patron-client relationship resembles the relationship between professionals and their clients in some ways. What makes these two different is that the former, like the traditional patron-client relationship, is a vertical relationship, while the latter does not presuppose a difference in socioeconomic statuses of parties involved. Clientelistic relations between leaders and members may exist in class consciousness-based organizations as well, but those relations within the FFF often cut across different socioeconomic classes. It may also be argued that the communist party, too, considers the peasantry as incapable of achieving liberation from its oppressors without the leadership from outside, in this case the proletariat [Guerrero 1979: 144], and that many of the communist leaders have the urban petty bourgeois or even landed class background. However, those communist leaders consciously reject the roots and extensions of that background and adopt the revolutionary class stand of the proletariat and serve the proletarian revolutionary cause [Sison 1989: 56–57], while the FFF leaders maintain their class background and seek harmonious relations between classes.<sup>11)</sup>

The kind of social relationship within the FFF explained above accounts for many other characteristic features of the FFF discussed earlier, most notably anti-communism, harmony between social classes, and political activities by peaceful means. These features, in turn, have been closely related to its activities which will be described below. Many of these activities are also found in many other current mass organizations and NGOs, but were quite innovative and new to the Philippine peasant movement when they were introduced by the FFF decades ago.

### 1. *Education*

The FFF has considered that education is its most important activity. Developed over the decades, its education programs have emphasized personal and social growth as much as, or even more than, acquisition of certain skills. The principal subjects covered include the theology of development, man and society, state and government, philosophy of property and economics, nationalism and culture, agrarian laws, land reform, principles of leadership, political action, public speaking and demonstrations, cooperatives, FFF philosophy, structure and operations, and spiritual retreat. The priority of the education has been given to the programs for leadership formation. Graduates of the leadership formation courses are expected to become leaders and officers of various branches of the federation and to conduct organizational meetings and activities in their respective regions [Montemayor 1969b: 206–207]. The FFF also developed basic orientation seminars

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11) From a theoretical viewpoint, while the feudal system may be most congenial to the patron-client relationships, of which the specialized patron-client relationship is one variation, they can adapt to different political systems including liberal democracy and authoritarianism except communism. Although patron-client relations may emerge in a communist system as well, existing patron-client relationships are not compatible with communism because it tries to destroy the class structure on which they thrive.

starting in 1970. Affiliation with the FFF requires taking up of this seminar, where the applicants will know exactly what they are getting into [FFF 1974: 2–20].

In addition, with a view to winning the support of other sectors of society, the FFF has organized seminars to student groups, professional groups, religious groups and personnel of different government offices. The FFF has occasionally been invited by various organizations to give lectures. The effects of the FFF's educational efforts reached even further through the books written by Montemayor.<sup>12)</sup>

### 2. *Legal Services and Public Administration Services*

The FFF has believed that justice is more important than production technology to improve the peasants' condition. However, they generally lack legal knowledge and cannot afford lawyers to defend their own legal rights. For this reason, legal services have continuously been one of the main activities of the FFF since its beginning. They range from providing legal advice to handling actual litigations. The legal services have also been instrumental in making amicable settlement of agrarian disputes. The legal cases the FFF has dealt with include tenant eviction, crop-sharing, recognition of legal relations between landowner and tenant, wages and other benefits for farm workers, and issuance of land titles for settlers and small landholders. In addition, the FFF has provided public administration services, since not all the problems have to be brought to court and the majority of them simply need to be threshed out in the various government offices [Montemayor 1969b: 207; FFF 1974: 37–47; Montemayor 1994: 40–43].

### 3. *Political Action*

Aiming to generate as much political influence for the peasantry as is commensurate with their number, the FFF has engaged in various political activities, which include lobbying, demonstrations and electoral participation.

There are a number of cases where lobbying activities of the FFF influenced the legislative process. The FFF participated in the drafting of the Agricultural Tenancy Act in 1954 and subsequent agrarian reform legislations such as the Republic Acts No. 1267 and No. 2263. In 1963, Montemayor was even appointed by President Macapagal to the Presidential Committee that drafted the Agricultural Land Reform Code [FFF 1974: 49–50]. The FFF continued to have significant legislative influence during Marcos' time. The degree of its influence, however, has varied considerably over time from the highest point during Magsaysay's presidency and the Marcos period after the declaration of

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12) For example, *Ours to Share* [Montemayor 1966] and *Philippine Socio-Economic Problems* [Montemayor 1969a] became textbooks and reference books in high schools, colleges and seminaries; *Labor, Agrarian and Social Legislation* [Montemayor 1967–68] was used by practicing lawyers, law professors and law students, and was frequently cited as authority by the courts [FFF 1974: 15].

martial law when the FFF was in a close relationship with the government to the lowest when it became alienated from the administration of President Aquino. Whatever the case, there is no denying that, given the landed class-dominated Congress, the legislative influence through lobbying has fallen far short of realizing their paramount objective.

Demonstrations and mass actions have been another important means of political action of the FFF directed toward favorable legislation and effective implementation of laws enacted. In addition, especially between 1969 and 1972, demonstrations and mass actions became spectacular and were held to impress the landlords as well as the people in general of the strength of the peasant masses [*ibid.*: 50–51].

With regard to electoral politics, the FFF had maintained a policy of non-partisanship and avoided to support a specific political party for practical reasons from the beginning until shortly before martial law. The nearest that the FFF had gone towards partisan political involvement was to support candidates who were sympathetic to the peasants' interests, regardless of their party affiliations. This was because there was little substantial difference between the two major parties of the time and that supporting one party would expose the FFF to the risk of being alienated from the government if the other party gained power. In presidential elections where the risk was high, therefore, the FFF had remained neutral.<sup>13)</sup> Moreover, the FFF by its constitution had practically banned its officers and leaders from running for an elective office not lower than city or municipal councilor [FFF 1956b: Article IX, Section 5].

The FFF departed from the policy of non-partisanship in the 1971 local elections where it took the lead in forming the Kamayan Party. The party fielded candidates mainly in the southern part of the Philippines and had some of them elected.<sup>14)</sup> In the 1978 Interim Batasang Pambansa elections, Montemayor ran on Marcos' KBL ticket and was elected. However, he was not successful in the 1984 Batasang Pambansa elections and the 1987 Senatorial elections. With the introduction of the party list system in 1998, the FFF formed the Alyansang Bayanihan ng mga Magsasaka, Manggagawang Bukid at Mangingisuda (ABA Party) and won a seat in the 1998 and the 2001 Congressional elections.

#### 4. Cooperatives

The cooperative movement plays a key role in the economic activities of the FFF, which

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13) Cited from the author's interview with Jeremias U. Montemayor (11 August 1986) in Quezon City. Also see Montemayor [1969b: 205–207]. Putzel [1992: 90], however, contradicts with regard to the 1953 presidential election.

14) The Kamayan Party was initiated by a group of FFF leaders led by the then public affairs department head, Charles Avila, who thought it viable to participate in the elections through its own political party given the expansion of the FFF membership and organization [FFF 1974: 48–49; Franco 1994: 15–16]. Also cited from the author's interview with Charles Avila (28 July 1994) in Barrio Capitolio, Quezon City.

are designed to serve the needs of peasants not only in terms of material benefits but also in terms of community participation, solidarity and development. It initially started with a cooperative consumer store inaugurated in 1955. As its activities expanded, the Federation of Free Farmers Cooperative, Inc. (FFFCI) was established in 1966 as a separate legal entity having practically the same leadership and membership. The FFFCI covers wide-ranging cooperative activities.

Before the members start to engage in actual enterprises, the FFFCI gives them seminars and courses on cooperatives. The first project a cooperative unit undertakes is usually a small-scale consumer store which deals in general merchandise for ordinary consumption and farming materials. The members, in turn, sell some of their products through the stores. As they acquire experience and management and bookkeeping skills, they become prepared to engage in bigger enterprises, such as a marketing cooperative to sell agricultural crops and fishery products. Eliminating their dependence on middlemen, the members can now make bigger profits by marketing their products through their own cooperatives. The hauling, drying and storage facilities for their products are also set up. Another common offshoot of a consumer store is a cooperative dealership in agricultural inputs such as fertilizer, pesticides, etc.

Other projects the FFFCI has undertaken include credit extension cooperatives, production cooperatives, settlement cooperatives, processing cooperatives, and a cooperative farmers' insurance program [FFF 1986]. Although these projects are not geographically as extensive as those explained above, some like processing cooperatives for flour and rice milling have been very successful and made considerable profits.

##### 5. *Religious Activities*

Although the FFF is a secular organization, religion has had a special place in it. Montemayor claimed that he looked upon the FFF movement as a form of his Christian apostolate. He believed that the peasant looked not only for an integrated meaning but also for an ultimate meaning of all things that concerned him. In order to get his total commitment to a movement, therefore, it must satisfy not only his economic needs but also his moral ideals and philosophical and theological instincts.

The FFF has maintained close relationships with religious circles since the very beginning by adopting the Catholic social teaching as its moral blueprint and inviting priests as its spiritual advisors and chaplains. The Church and the religious, however, are not to direct the FFF or to dictate its policies and programs, but are supposed to help develop its moral, spiritual and religious dimensions. Specifically, the FFF chaplains say mass, administer sacraments, and speak on the religious dimension of the movement in the organizational meetings and activities. The churchmen are expected to help set up a good moral atmosphere within the organization [FFF 1974: 78-85]. The FFF has also arranged religious retreats and catechetical instructions.

## 6. *Others*

The FFF has continuously tried to facilitate youth and women's participation in the movement. Also noteworthy is its cultural activities, which grew out of the premise that the socioeconomic problems were embedded in a cultural matrix consisting of feudal, colonial and capitalistic concepts, values and attitudes and, therefore, these must be changed to solve the agrarian problems. The cultural activities were most active from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, and the main projects were radio programs composed of dramas, commentaries, interviews and discussions [*ibid.*: 57-64].

Lastly, the FFF's international relations must be mentioned. It has participated in various international conferences and seminars on agrarian and other relevant subjects since its early years. It has maintained close relations with several prominent international organizations. While their immediate motivation for establishing various international contacts was the need of financial assistance, it gave learning opportunities to the FFF leaders and national as well as international recognition to the organization.

## IV Development of the Philippine Peasant Movement after the Collapse of the Huks

### 1. *From the 1950s to the Late 1960s*

After the collapse of the Huks, the FFF virtually dominated the Philippine peasant movement from the middle of the 1950s through the 1960s. The government also organized peasants to some extent [Po 1980: 31], but no peasant organization rivaled the FFF. During this period, the FFF's membership steadily increased, and by the beginning of 1956, it had risen to about 22,000 in 11 provinces [FFF Undated-a, 2nd quarter 1956: 1]. In 1957, the organization expanded into 23 provinces, with the membership reaching about 36,000 [FFF Undated-a, 1st quarter of 1957: 1]. Around this time, the FFF also started to recruit the rural youth to give them training and organized them into the Junior Free Farmers (JFF) [FFF Undated-a, 4th Quarter of 1957: 5; 4th Quarter of 1958: 17]. In the field of legal support, the FFF handled 1,554 cases in the first three years, of which 1,080 went to court and the remainder were settled out of court [FFF 1956a: 4]. The number of cases of legal support increased steadily thereafter. With regard to cooperatives, the FFF inaugurated its first consumer store in Alaminos, Pangasinan in January 1955 followed by other places [Montemayor 1955: 385-387], and started credit cooperatives and production cooperatives in 1959 [FFF Undated-a, 1st and 2nd quarter 1959: 9-10]. In that year, the national office of the FFF was moved from Ateneo de Manila to the newly built residence of Montemayor in Quezon City.<sup>15)</sup> The phenomenal growth of the

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15) Since then until now, Montemayor's residence has continuously been the national office of the FFF.

FFF in these formative years was undoubtedly facilitated by the anti-communist campaign of the government and Montemayor's close relationship with President Ramon Magsaysay.<sup>16)</sup>

The 1960s, in turn, was a period in which the FFF expanded its organization not only quantitatively but also in qualitative terms. Especially important was that people from the religious circles, the youth and students became increasingly involved in the activities of the FFF. At that time, influenced by the Second Vatican Council (1962–66), the Catholic Church in the Philippines was seeking more active ways of social involvement, and the agrarian problems were regarded as an important issue. Therefore, the FFF, which embraced the Catholic social teaching as its moral guidance, attracted numerous religious people. Among them were seminarians of the Society of the Divine Word such as Charles Avila who would become Secretary in 1968 and a Vice-President in 1971 and Edicio de la Torre who would become a national chaplain in 1969. Furthermore, the urban youth became involved in the FFF movement. They helped both in the work of their rural counterpart and the federation.<sup>17)</sup>

In addition, the FFF and Montemayor himself came to receive international recognition. Since its formation, the FFF had actively sought and developed many international linkages. For example, it was regularly invited to the conferences of the International Peasant Union in the 1950s. In 1967, the FFF formally affiliated itself to the International Federation of Plantation, Agricultural and Allied Workers (IFPAAW) with headquarters in Geneva and to the Vatican-based International Catholic Rural Association (ICRA), of which Montemayor later became President for four years. Through these and other international organizations, the FFF had contact with numerous rural organizations, institutions and agencies all over the world. Financial assistance the FFF received from various funding institutions abroad increased significantly.<sup>18)</sup> Further, Montemayor was appointed by Pope Paul VI to the Vatican Council on the Laity in 1968, and held its

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16) President Ramon Magsaysay's younger brother, Genaro, was Montemayor's classmate in the College of Law of the Ateneo de Manila. It was Genaro Magsaysay who convinced the President to invite Montemayor to Malacanang. Col. Mamerto Montemayor, his uncle, was one of the president's closest military aides. Some of the people around Magsaysay were his Ateneo classmates or teachers such as J. V. Cruz, Raul Manglapus, Manuel Manahan, etc. [Montemayor 2003: 155–158]

17) Their main activity was the summer work camp program initiated in 1967. Under this program, 6 to 15 young people lived with the barrio people and worked with the barrio youth for about one month, making surveys of barrio problems, promoting athletics and recreation, teaching catechism, and helping in such technical projects as the setting up of cooperative units and irrigation systems. There was a single work camp in 1967; 4 work camps in 3 provinces in 1968; and 32 in various provinces in 1969 [Montemayor 1969b: 208].

18) These funding institutions include the Apostolic Nuncio, the Asia Foundation (U. S. A.), the Catholic Relief Services, the Cooperative League of the U. S. A., the Center for Rural Development (U. S. A.), the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung of Germany, the MISEREOR of Germany, the Zentralstelle of Germany, the Caritas Verband of Germany, the Swiss Lenten Appeal, ↗

membership until 1975.

## 2. *From the Late 1960s to the Declaration of Martial Law in 1972*

In 1968, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) was reestablished. This year was also a landmark in the history of the Philippine peasant movement. Throughout the 1960s, anti-American nationalism was on the rise due in part to the Vietnam War, and the leftist movements were gathering momentum, with students and youths of the new generation joining them. Numerous organizations were formed in the context of this new political current. Among these organizations was the Kabataang Makabayan (KM), which was founded mainly by students in Manila in 1964 and played a leading role in rebuilding the CPP under the leadership of Jose Maria Sison, then a young instructor of the University of the Philippines. Sison temporarily joined the PKP in 1963 that had already lost its political clout. However, he became disillusioned with the party leadership that had abandoned the armed struggle, and opted to rebuild the party independently. The reestablished CPP followed the Mao Tsetung Thought and attached great importance to armed struggle with the strategy of encircling the cities from the countryside. To that end, the CPP formed the New People's Army (NPA) in 1969. The NPA was basically a peasant army and began to rapidly expand its support basis across the nation, starting from Central Luzon. In the historical context of the peasant movement, these developments can be regarded as a reaction to the failure to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the peasants during the period after the collapse of the Huks and as a criticism against the "democratic, peaceful revolution" within the framework of representative democracy advocated by the FFF.

Following Marcos' reelection in the 1969 presidential election which was characterized with the massive fraud and inordinate use of violence, the year 1970 started with an unprecedented upsurge of student movements demanding political and economic reforms, with various student groups holding demonstrations and picketing day after day. As the demonstrators were met with the police and military forces, bloody incidents followed. The student movements soon developed into broader anti-government movements, involving industrial workers and peasants. The anti-government campaigns were linked with various political forces, which included the CPP that led the left wing of the movements. In addition, the worsening of the economy as seen in the increasing inflation and unemployment rates and the deterioration of the peace and order situation due to the rising crime rates caused serious social unrest. Under these conditions, President Marcos, who was aiming to stay in power despite the constitutional prohibition on the presidential re-election for the third term, declared martial law in September 1972,

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↙ CEBEMO of Holland, the Asian-American Free Labor Institute of AFL-CIO, the World Neighbors, the Catholic Rural Movement of Australia, John C. Lincoln Institute, the Land Reform Training Institute (Taiwan) [FFF 1974: 77].



ostensibly because of a communist revolt. The Philippine political scene thus entered a new phase.

Alongside these new political developments, there were leaders within the FFF who had felt limitations of their conventional approach and had come to opt for more radical actions. They took the initiative in mobilizing peasants to organize frequent demonstrations and picketing since the late 1960s. In 1970, the FFF-led large-scale demonstrations were held 16 times across the nation, including Manila. January of 1971 began with a demonstration in front of the Office of the President, attended by 5,000 peasants, workers and youths. One of the young leaders of the FFF, named Pedro Aquino, was shot to death, and another incident occurred in which about 40 peasants who had been involved in a dispute with landlords were arrested on charges of looting. In March, a total of 2,500 peasants and students demonstrated before the Congress, protesting against the murder of the young leader and demanding the enactment of agrarian reform laws. From that point, overnight picketing and demonstrations became the FFF's usual activities [FFF Undated-b: 19–25].

During this period, the FFF continued to grow rapidly and draw support from other sectors of society especially the religious and the youth. By the end of 1971, its membership had become 128,560 in 45 provinces; there were 43 provincial chaplains, 18 sisters and 33 bishops helping the federation. Its mass actions and other activities were supported by youth groups such as the National Union of Students of the Philippines (NUSP), Khi-Rho Movement and Mag-aaral Para sa Malayang Magsasaka (MMM). Furthermore, the FFF formed a loose alliance called KIBAPIL with KASAPI, LAKASDIWA, and others [*ibid.*: 2, 28, 29, 43]. The FFF was in a pivotal position in the political movements of the noncommunist forces.

The FFF's move towards radicalism, however, was not without tensions within the organization. Internal conflicts developed out of a leadership struggle and different views on the Catholic framework of social action. Those who spearheaded the radical actions were composed mainly of former seminarians and leaders of the youth and student groups who had joined the FFF in the 1960s. As these new leaders (mostly in their 20s) came to play increasingly influential roles, their relations with the old guards like Edgardo Viriña, a loyal follower of Montemayor since the 1950s, became strained, the latter group placing more importance on their conventional approach.<sup>19)</sup> Ideologically, the Marxist social analysis gained acceptance among a considerable segment of the church people who had involved themselves in the agrarian problems at the grass roots. Many

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19) A major conflict first emerged over the use of the large amount of MISEREOR fund between Charles Avila's group that wanted to spend mainly for political activities focusing on Visayas and Mindanao on one hand and Edgardo Viriña's group that placed more importance on Luzon on the other. The two opposing groups eventually took different positions vis-à-vis Marcos' martial law government. Cited from the author's interview with Victor Gerardo Bulatao (25 August, 2004) in Quezon City.

of these people were working with the FFF. They came to reject the reformist approach as petit bourgeois and became attracted to the theology of liberation such as the case with Fr. Edicio de la Torre who would organize the Christians for National Liberation in 1972, making their crash with Montemayor's staunch anti-communist line inevitable.<sup>20)</sup>

### 3. *From 1972 to the People Power Revolution of 1986*

The 1972 declaration of martial law and the mass arrest of its militant leaders and chaplains by the government immediately thereafter greatly shocked the FFF. The discord within the FFF on how to cope with martial law eventually led to a split of the organization. The mainstream faction, represented by Montemayor, decided to support the government on the grounds that Marcos had promised agrarian reform and that peace and order would be restored under martial law. The potential for land reform under martial law appeared as a great hope to the FFF, which was fretting over the slow progress of the reform in the previous landlord-dominated Congress despite its advocacy of democratic revolution through the unified peasants' organization since the time of its foundation nearly 20 years before.<sup>21)</sup> On the other hand, the radical leaders protested against the restrictions of freedom and human right violations under martial law as well as Marcos' ambition to stay in power.

In the National Policy Board (NPB) meeting held concurrently with the National Convention in December 1972, Montemayor managed to pass a resolution "that the FFF should support the martial law regime of President Ferdinand E. Marcos, particularly all reforms of the New Society [FFF undated-f, 8-10 December 1972: 2]." In the elections of the National Executive Office (NEXO) members, however, while Montemayor secured his presidency, the anti-martial law faction won the positions of Executive Vice President (Manuel Mondejar, Jr.), Second Vice President (Charles Avila), Third Vice President (Ludovico Villamor), and Secretary (Victor Gerardo Bulatao), as well as another member

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20) For an analysis of the internal conflict of the FFF in terms of contradictions of the Catholic framework of social action, see Bolasco [1994: 239-255]. For other related accounts, see Fabros [1988: 146-155] and Youngblood [1990: 63-83].

21) Cited from the author's interview with Jeremias U. Montemayor (19 July 1994) in Quezon City. An internal document of the FFF enumerated five chief reasons for supporting the martial law administration and the leadership of President Marcos: (1) Liquidation of the private armies of landlords and oligarchs, which used to intimidate and oppress the peasants; (2) Great reduction of graft and corruption in government, a much improved peace and order situation; (3) The land reform measures on agrarian reform as well as the other forms of socio-economic reforms under the new society; (4) The intolerable and fast-deteriorating situation during the period immediately preceding the declaration of martial law; and (5) In many aspects the ordinary peasant, who had never enjoyed the so-called civil liberties since he was born, actually became more free under martial law [FFF 1974: 51].

(Felicisimo Patayan) [*ibid.*, 8–10 December 1972: 1 ].<sup>22)</sup> An extremely tense and volatile situation continued until the one-week NPB meeting in Palo, Leyte that started on 23 June 1973. On 28 June the meeting was raided by the government, and some anti-Marcos leaders were arrested.<sup>23)</sup> Montemayor also expelled the major radical leaders from the organization upon his assumption of the emergency powers granted to him by the NPB on 29 June.<sup>24)</sup> Some of these leaders joined the Communist Party and others formed a third

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- 22) According to Charles Avila, the Anti-Montemayor faction retained Montemayor as President in order to deal with Marcos, while sending him their message. Cited from the author's interview with Charles Avila (28 July 1994) in Barrio Capitolio, Quezon City. Victor Gerardo Bulatao says in retrospect that no one else could have filled the FFF presidency. Cited from the author's interview with Victor Gerardo Bulatao (25 August 2004) in Teachers' Village West, Quezon City.
- 23) Cited from the author's interview with Victor Gerardo Bulatao (15 August 1994) in Loyola Heights, Quezon City. Bulatao was among those who were arrested.
- 24) RESOLVED, to grant to Dean Jeremias U. Montemayor, FFF National President, full and complete emergency powers to safeguard the security of the organization, to cleanse its membership and leadership of all taint of infiltration/subversion and to make arrangements with the government for this purpose for mutual cooperation, to ensure the organization's full continuance and to promote its objectives and to take every step necessary or advisable for the accomplishment of all the foregoing, including separation, dismissal, suspension, disciplining and shuffling of any officer, personnel or member of the organization, and the filling up of any vacant position in, and the creation of, any office, committee, council or board of the organization [FFF Undated-f, 29 June 1973]. Soon after his assumption of the emergency powers, Montemayor issued the following letter:

August 14, 1973

To all concerned:

Please note that the following persons have been separated/resigned from the Federation of Free Farmers as of the dates mentioned respectively after their names, and as of said dates they are no longer connected with the FFF:

- |                                     |                |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Charles R. Avila                 | - 30 June 1973 |
| 2. Renato Navata                    | - 30 June 1973 |
| 3. Inocencio Ipong                  | - 30 June 1973 |
| 4. Emilio Neri                      | - 30 June 1973 |
| 5. Manuel E. Mondejar, Jr.          | - 02 July 1973 |
| 6. Ludovico E. Villamor             | - 02 July 1973 |
| 7. Victor Gerardo Bulatao           | - 02 July 1973 |
| 8. Gerardo J. Esguerra              | - 02 July 1973 |
| 9. Cesar C. Maskariñas              | - 02 July 1973 |
| 10. Mrs. Evelyn Santayana-Ledesma   | - 03 July 1973 |
| 11. Mrs. Ermelita B. Mondejar       | - 03 July 1973 |
| 12. Miss Leticia P. Jimenez         | - 03 July 1973 |
| 13. Miss Amelita "melot" Balisalisa | - 03 July 1973 |
| 14. Fr. Zacarias Agatep             | - 03 July 1973 |
| 15. Felicisimo Patayan              | - 05 July 1973 |
| 16. Edgar Valenzuela                | - 05 July 1973 |
| 17. Fr. Patrick Healy, S. S. C.     | - 05 July 1973 |

“illegal” political force.<sup>25)</sup> Whatever the case, anti-government activities had to be carried out underground now that any opposition to the government was practically banned.

After the sweeping organizational shuffle,<sup>26)</sup> the FFF maintained its moderate line. While it was harshly criticized by the anti-Marcos side and lost much of the Church support, it secured a certain degree of influence over the government in agrarian matters in return for its support of the regime. In fact, this enabled the FFF to act as an adviser for drafting presidential decrees on agrarian matters and gained easy access to the Ministries of Agrarian Reform, Justice, Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Labor and Employment as well as the military. Montemayor was appointed as Special Presidential Assistant on Agrarian Reform in 1977. In 1978, he ran in the Interim Batasang Pambansa (Parliament) elections on Marcos’ KBL ticket and was elected.

During the martial law period, the FFF enjoyed a privileged status owing to its close relationship with the government. It was, however, no longer a single dominant force in the peasant movement. New movements were brewing. One of them was the formation and development of other moderate peasant organizations. This does not mean that no other peasant organizations existed before martial law. In fact, the Malayang Samahang Magsasaka (MASAKA) was organized mainly by the former KPMP-affiliated members of the Huks in 1964. The Filipino Agrarian Reform Movement (FARM) was formed under the leadership of some intellectuals including journalists in 1969. Luis Taruc, who had been pardoned by Marcos and released in the previous year, also joined the FARM. After the declaration of martial law, the FARM developed into the Federation of Land Reform Farmers (FLRF) in 1973. Taruc organized in 1974 the Federation of Agrarian and Industrial Toiling Hands (FAITH), which consisted mainly of the former AMT-affiliated

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- |                               |                |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| 18. Fr. Luis Jarandoni        | - 06 July 1973 |
| 19. Fr. Pio Eugenio, S. V. D. | - 05 July 1973 |
| 20. Miss Rita Baua            | - 10 July 1973 |
| 21. Jose S. Traspe            | - 12 July 1973 |
| 22. Sr. Eva Marie Varon, SCMM | - 19 July 1973 |
| 23. Miss Gloria Abrenica      | - 31 July 1973 |

The present set-up of the National Policy Board and the National Executive Office is as indicated in the attached paper.

(Sgd.)

Jeremias U. Montemayor  
President and NPB Chairman

25) Reflections of both sides on the split after 30 years are given in Montemayor [2003: 302-335].

26) One of the consequences of the reorganization was that Montemayor’s children began to play increasingly influential roles within the federation. Leonie, who had been leading the youth department of the NEXO, filled the position of National Secretary upon dissociation of Victor Gerardo Bulatao and continued to hold that position (later renamed Secretary-General) until he took over the FFF presidency in 2003, a year after his father’s death. Raul and Cecil became heads of different departments of the NEXO, the former eventually becoming the FFFCI president.

members of the Huks. Both of these two organizations continued to take a cooperative stance toward the Marcos regime. Furthermore, the government took the initiative in founding the Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries Association (ARBA) in 1979. Pambansang Katipunan ng mga Samahang Nayon (PKSN), was also formed almost at the same time. In 1980, the United Farmers and Fishermen Association of the Philippines (UFFAP), which had started as the BAEx sponsored Federation of Farmers Association of the Philippines (FFAP) in the 1950s, was launched in Mindanao as an organization independent of government. Of these organizations, the FLRF, FAITH, ARBA and UFFAP, together with FFF, coalesced under the National Congress of Farmers Organizations (NCFO) in 1981.

In the meantime, the peasant movement under the influence of the CPP continued to grow rapidly. The declaration of martial law, which was intended to contain the communists, actually entailed their expansion, because the oppressive, authoritarian government drove many of the radicals, including student activists and intellectuals as well as peasant and labor leaders, who had previously distanced themselves from communism, to go underground and join the communist movement. In 1973, the CPP rallied a wide range of forces opposed to Marcos's dictatorship and organized the National Democratic Front (NDF), and their activists energetically organized peasants and workers. As of 1983, the NPA was estimated to have at least 12,000 full-time guerrillas and 35,000 part-time militias operating in 56 out of 72 provinces and in 400 out of 1,500 municipalities across the country [Nemenzo 1984: 57]. Furthermore, the development of the communist-led, above-the-ground peasant and labor movement led to the formation of the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU) in 1980 and the Kilusang Magbubukid sa Pilipinas (KMP) in 1985. The KMP was established as a federation of the organizations that had gradually been formed in different areas of the Philippines and came to play a central role in the subsequent radical peasant movement.

#### 4. *From 1986 to the 1990s*

The Philippine political situation underwent a drastic change overnight when Benigno Aquino, Jr., the former senator and arch-political enemy of Marcos, was assassinated in August 1983. This was the turning point for the Marcos regime which had seemed unshakable since the declaration of martial law. Confidence in Marcos plunged and a serious economic crisis ensued. Unprecedentedly large protest campaigns since martial law suddenly arose in Metro Manila, this time involving the middle-class people who had previously been apolitical. As a result, there were waves of frequent demonstrations. The traditional opposition parties, which were gradually expanding their organizations after the resumption of elections in 1978 and lifting of martial law in 1981, began to intensify their criticism of Marcos, demanding his immediate resignation. Toward the end of 1985, Marcos announced to hold a special presidential election in the following February to seek people's mandate. The election, which turned out to be a head-on clash

between Marcos and Corazon Aquino, the widow of the late former senator, became extremely fraudulent. This caused further political upheaval with masses of people joining the Aquino camp's civil disobedience campaign, and induced a revolt by a segment of the military. As the people supported the rebels and the majority of the military finally defected to the rebel side, Marcos was forced to seek refuge in the United States, and Aquino was installed as President. This was called the "people's power revolution."

The NCFO, of which the FFF was a member, as well as the PKSN, openly supported Marcos in the special presidential election. Nonetheless, although Montemayor and many of its leaders did support Marcos, the FFF could not take a stand as an organization in order to keep unity in the face of dissenting opinions from within.<sup>27)</sup> The KMP followed the decision of the CPP to boycott the election. As a result, the FFF found itself alienated from the center of power during Aquino's presidency. Montemayor ran for the 1987 senatorial elections under the banner of the Grand Alliance for Democracy (GAD), an anti-Aquino coalition, but failed to be elected. On the other hand, the NCFO virtually resolved, and its member organizations, except for the FFF, and the PKSN joined the formation of the SANDUGUAN, a new umbrella organization which gathered a total of 14 peasant organizations. Although most of its member organizations had supported Marcos in the special presidential election, the SANDUGUAN was able to secure a pro-Aquino position through its close relation with new Minister of Agriculture, Ramon Mitra, who was to become Speaker of the House of Representatives after the 1987 congressional elections. Also under the umbrella of the SANDUGUAN were the FAITH and the Aniban ng Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (AMA), a successor organization of the MASAKA established in 1976. Both the FAITH and the AMA, however, had already lost their once radical character.<sup>28)</sup> All other affiliates of the SANDUGUAN had an organiza-

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27) In fact, three NPB members, namely, Laurentino Bascug, Mateo Bihag and Glicerio Tan who had become critical of Marcos despite their previous support of martial law, left the FFF in 1985, and formed a splinter organization, the Lakas ng Magsasaka, Manggagawa at Mangangisuda ng Pilipinas, in 1987. This, according to Laurentino Bascug, was the third major split of the FFF, the first being the split in 1957 when Fernando Esguerra (then Executive Vice-President and co-founder of the FFF) and his followers left the federation and the second one in 1973. Cited from the author's interview with Laurentino Bascug (17 May 1994) at 61 Kalayaan Avenue, Quezon City.

28) The reasons why they lost their radical character were as follows. Luis Taruc, the FAITH president, developed special relations with Marcos after the latter released the former from imprisonment by an executive pardon in 1968. Marcos also recognized the Hukbalahap as a patriotic organization that fought against Japan, and released and gave amnesty to those former Huk members recommended by Taruc. Marcos appointed Taruc to government positions such as Presidential Assistant to Land Reform and a sectoral representative to the Interim Batasang Pambansa (1978) and the Batasang Pambansa (1984). Cited from the author's interview with Luis M. Taruc (7 August 1986), Quezon City. The MASAKA entered into a political settlement (the national unity agreement) with the government after ↗

tional structure that can be characterized as a network of specialized patron-client relations basically in the same way as has characterized the FFF.

The political stances of these moderate peasant organizations as well as the relations among them have changed depending on the changing political situations. After the 1992 presidential election, as Defense Secretary Fidel Ramos was elected President, the SANDUGUAN that had supported Speaker Mitra was in turn alienated from government. At the same time, the alliance became weakened, with the FLRF breaking away. On the other hand, the FFF, which had taken a neutral position in the election, had some success in regaining lost ground. Montemayor's son, Leonie, was appointed by President Ramos as a congressman representing the peasant sector. The president of the FLRF, Vic Tagle was also appointed as a congressman. In the 1998 elections, the FFF and the SANDUGUAN formed their own political parties, namely, the Alyansang Bayanihan ng mga Magsasaka, Manggagawang Bukid at Mangingisuda (ABA) and the Luzon Farmers Party (BUTIL) respectively, and participated in the party-list system, which had been introduced to elect 20% of the seats in the House of Representatives. The two parties had one candidate elected respectively, namely, Leonie Montemayor and Benjamin Cruz.

Meanwhile, the leftist forces under the communist influence lost momentum after the "people's power revolution." They misread the sentiment of the people who wanted to participate in the special presidential election, and boycotted it, assuming that Marcos would stay in power by rigging the election. This, coupled with the restoration of democracy which made different ways of political participation possible, caused desertion of their sympathizers who had considered the national democratic line of the left as the only viable option to fight the Marcos dictatorship. Their election boycott also prevented them from securing influence within the Aquino administration. Nevertheless, the KMP maintained its national presence throughout the latter half of the 1980s. Its chairman, Jaime Tadeo, was appointed by President Aquino in 1986 as one of the 48 Commissioners of the Constitutional Commission that drafted the new constitution. The KMP also raised voice to exert influence on the agrarian policy of the government through its participation in the Congress for a People's Agrarian Reform (CPAR) and by mobilizing mass actions.

Then came the collapse of communism in East Europe extending from 1989 through the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, which was a serious blow to the leftists who were trying hard to recover from the setback. It became obvious that communism was most unlikely to bring about an ideal society. The CPP and the political organizations under its influence, which had been considered monolithic, began to split into a few blocs and, as a result, rapidly declined. The impact was directly reflected in the KMP as

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↙ Marcos signed Presidential Decree No. 27 (Tenant Emancipation Decree) right after his declaration of martial law [Franco 1994: 19]. In addition, prominent leaders of these organizations were getting old.

well. In 1993, Jaime Tadeo's faction departed from the communist line, splintered away from the KMP, and launched the Demokratikong Kilusang Magbubukid sa Pilipinas (DKMP). The KMP under Raphael Mariano's leadership remained loyal to the CPP. This resulted in a situation where there were two class struggle-oriented peasant organizations opposing each other and losing influence.

Alongside these developments on the left, the new political space opened up by the "people's power revolution" induced active political participation of NGOs including those seriously concerned with the agrarian problems. As early as 1987, for example, a number of NGOs such as the Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (PHILDHRRA) played an important role in launching the CPAR involving many peasant organizations and other voluntary groups in an attempt to forge a united stand on the agrarian reform, which was one of the most urgent agenda of the Aquino administration [PHILDHRRA 1987: 6]. Furthermore, encouraged by the government policy of people's empowerment coupled with the abundant funding from abroad, the number of NGOs phenomenally increased from the late 1980s. For many of those activists who had fought the Marcos regime, NGOs were their new means of political involvement.

## V Conclusions

This paper has argued that the history of the Philippine peasant movement since the 1950s cannot be understood adequately by extending the view that the dominant types of peasant movements since the 1930s have been secular and based on class consciousness. The FFF, which was established in 1953 when the communist-led peasant movement was losing the armed class struggle and which became the single dominant peasant organization in the 1960s, has not been a class consciousness-based organization but has been an organization structured based on what may be called specialized patron-client relationships led by professionals and intellectuals. Also, the FFF's ideology, aims, platform and activities are diametrically opposite to those of the communist-led peasant movement, such as anti-communism in favor of liberal democracy, harmony between social classes instead of class struggle, and political activities by peaceful means without violence. Furthermore, although the FFF is basically a secular movement, it has a certain degree of religious influence in that its philosophical foundation rests upon Catholic social teaching and that the religious people such as Catholic priests have been involved significantly in its organization and activities. Many of the characteristic features of the FFF, except for the religious aspect, are also found in other moderate peasant organizations,<sup>29)</sup> the

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29) In fact, the specialized patron-client model applies to the SANDUGUAN even better than the FFF, which in the late 1960s and the early 1970s had some elements, such as those that joined the communist movement, who did not fit in well with the model.



number of which has increased since the end of the 1960s.

The moderate peasant movements, however, could only make limited progress in solving the agrarian problems. It was in reaction to this situation that the class struggle-oriented peasant movement revived following the reestablishment of the communist party in 1968 and the subsequent formation of the NPA in 1969. Since then, two opposite types of movements have coexisted for a couple of decades. However, the class-based, radical peasant movement has entered an era of split and decline after the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and East Europe. Will the moderate side manage to dominate the scene for long? The answer is likely to depend on to what extent the moderates can contribute to improving the socioeconomic conditions of the peasants. With the progress of industrialization in the Philippines, the number of people employed in the non-agricultural sectors surpassed that in agriculture in the early 1980s, and has continued to increase. Nonetheless, it should not be forgotten that a very large population still live in rural villages and work in the agricultural sector and that peasants are the ones who have hardly been beneficiaries of industrialization. If their circumstances do not improve and even aggravate, a different type of peasant movement will emerge based on another political thought or religious tenet, if not communism any longer. In fact, the proliferation of NGOs including those deeply involved in the agrarian problems and even the spread of charismatic movements since the late 1980s may be viewed in this light.

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\* The term "peasant" is used in this article to refer to agricultural tenants, agricultural laborers, small owner-cultivators without tenants as well as self-employed agricultural workers without employees, and their dependents. In other words, the term is defined in terms of economic sector and production relations. Wealth may be added as a third criterion. Therefore, those who work outside the primary industry and those who have tenants or employees as well as those who are wealthy are excluded from the peasantry. The FFF originally limited its membership to: (a) agricultural tenants; (b) small landowners who till the land themselves, including independent salt makers, poultry and other livestock raisers under employment; (c) fishpond laborers and persons engaged in fishing; and (d) prospective farmers [FFF 1956b: Article III]. By the 1980s, the FFF membership qualifications had been expanded to include: (a) agricultural tenants; (b) small landowners who till the land themselves, including independent salt makers, poultry and livestock raisers; (c) agricultural laborers such as those employed by a sugar central or in plantations, including salt makers, poultry and other livestock raisers under employment; (d) fishpond laborers and persons engaged in fishing; (e) any laborer employed in the production, transportation, or milling of any agriculture, forestry or mining products; (f) prospective farmers; (g) all transport employees; (h) ambulant, intermittent and itinerant workers whether in agriculture or non-agricultural areas or enterprises; (i) rural workers, whether employed or self-employed; (j) wage earners; and (k) "squatters" and landless individuals who may desire to acquire or hold lands or dwellings. Anyone who regularly has tenants or employees in connection with any agricultural, fishing, transportation or mining enterprise is disqualified from becoming a member of the federation; but this provision does not apply to tenants employing or hiring seasonal helpers for transplanting and harvesting [FFF 1988: Article III].

### Acknowledgements

The early part of the author's research on the Philippine peasant movement was supported by the Japan Foundation Fellowship (1992) and the Bilateral Exchange Program of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (1993-94).

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