

New Philippines Rupture

By Sister Maria del Ray, MM
Religious News Service
Correspondent

Manila [RNS] — The "Novaliches incident," in which some 125 priests, Sisters and lay leaders were subjected to search and harassment at a Jesuit novitiate and retreat house, has become the latest and most serious confrontation between Church officials and the Department of Defense, headed by Juan Ponce-Enrile.

Flanked by heads of all religious congregations, Archbishop Jaime L. Sin celebrated a Mass in the Manila Cathedral ending a three-hour prayer service on Sunday, Sept. 2.

During the service he urged that government officials "sincerely dedicate themselves to justice," and that 21 persons detained as a result of the raid (a priest and 20 students) be "dealt with fairly, justly and speedily."

In response to a letter from the archbishop, similar services were held in parishes.

Manila newspapers, The Bulletin Today and The Daily Express, termed the massive meetings as "prayers for peace." Archbishop Sin had earlier accused these newspapers of "erroneous and misleading reporting" of the Novaliches raid.

The raid occurred Aug. 24 at Sacred Heart Novitiate and the Pastoral Renewal Center, about 13 miles north of Manila, near the town of Novaliches. Besides the buildings, there is a farm.

The following groups were present at the time: 23 Jesuit priests and Brothers, among them Father Isaias Edralin, first cousin of the mother of President Ferdinand E. Marcos; 15 Jesuit novices and several members of the novitiate staff; 25 nuns

finishing an eight-day retreat. They were from Australia, Hong Kong, Malaysia, England, Ireland, Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Pakistan and Japan. Three were from the Philippines.

Also, 22 priests ending a Pastoral and Spiritual renewal course, 13 men and seven women from the Student Catholic Action of the Philippines, attending a one-day seminar under Father Jose Blanco, SJ. Father Blanco was active in anti-Marcos demonstrations before martial law was declared in September, 1972.

Workers in kitchens, poultry house and farm, and a few people there on business.

Father Francis Alessi, PIME, executive secretary of the Association of Major Superiors of Men in the Philippines, and an eyewitness, reported:

"At 10 a.m. Philippine Army helicopters landed on the compound and 150 men in full battle gear spread out to stand 20 meters apart. They quickly established radio contact with their command. Everyone of us surmised that this was either a maneuver or a military exercise as the soldiers darted behind trees and bushes. Some guessed that the President's mother might be coming to visit her cousin and this was an oversized body guard.

"In a few minutes, other armed men arrived in civilian cars, military jeeps and buses, and swarmed over the property and buildings. Many were mature men, others, mere youngsters, but all bore armalites, sub-machine guns, pistols or other weapons. They preceded to search all buildings in utmost confusion, kicking in doors, rummaging through closets and desks, visiting the same room many times.

The officer-in-charge, a Colonel Batalla, produced a mimeographed warrant signed by

Defense Secretary Juan Ponce-Enrile, to arrest Jose M. Sison et al., and Father Jose Nacu, SJ. Mr. Sison is head of the Communist Party in the Philippines; Father Nacu is a political prisoner, recently escaped from Camp Crame. Neither one was on the

Novaliches compound. Archbishop Sin said he was informed of the raid more than an hour after it had started. Newspaper reports gave the erroneous impression he said that the church had participated in planning the raid.

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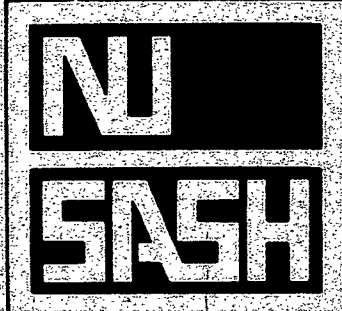
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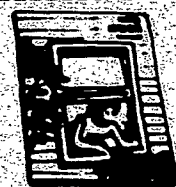
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