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**CONFUSION GROWS FROM THE BARREL
OF A GUN: THE COMMUNIST PARTY
OF THE PHILIPPINES**

By David Glanz

BSc (Hons), University of Salford

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

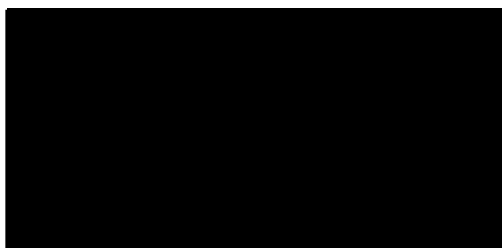
| | |
|---|-----|
| Summary and candidate's statement..... | i |
| Acknowledgements..... | ii |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Part One: The Theory and Philosophy of the CPP | |
| Chapter One: The Communist Parties' Common Heritage..... | 16 |
| Chapter Two: Semifeudalism – A Theory at Odds With the Facts..... | 40 |
| Chapter Three: National Liberation – The Impossible Dream?..... | 69 |
| Chapter Four: The Working Class – Symbol or Substance?..... | 94 |
| Part Two: Strategic Moments – Case Studies and Developments | |
| Chapter Five: In the Eye of the Storm..... | 119 |
| Chapter Six: Cracks in the Monolith..... | 140 |
| Chapter Seven: Down the Slippery Slope..... | 174 |
| Chapter Eight: Into the Abyss..... | 200 |
| Conclusion: So Near and Yet So Far..... | 226 |
| Bibliography..... | 230 |

SUMMARY

THIS THESIS examines the rise and subsequent fall of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), established in 1968 to supplant the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP). The first half traces the continuities between the PKP and CPP and locates them in the international Stalinist tradition. It examines the CPP's arguments on semifeudalism, nationalism and the role of the working class and argues that the CPP's national democratic framework leads to a subordination of working-class interests and a false counterposition of rural, armed struggle to urban, legal struggle. The second half of the thesis looks at the way in which the party's underlying theory affected its role in key upheavals in Philippine society. It concludes that the CPP's theoretical framework disqualified it from playing a leading role in the People Power revolution of 1986 and thus contributed to the party's marginalisation.

CANDIDATE'S STATEMENT

THIS THESIS contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution and the candidate affirms, to the best of his knowledge, that the thesis contains no material published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.



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INTRODUCTION

BY 1986, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) had grown from humble beginnings to a membership of about 30,000, deploying the largest guerilla force in South-east Asia, the New People's Army (NPA).¹ Within six years it had split, losing much of its membership and influence. Beginning work on this thesis in late 1991-early 1992, I argued that, despite appearances, the CPP was likely to move into crisis. Within a year, the case had been overtaken by events. This thesis is therefore an attempt to explain the party's trajectory.

The story of the CPP's slide cannot be completely separated from the impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellites in Eastern Europe. Yet, initially, the CPP seemed exempt, insulated by its circumstances and methodology. Its supporters claimed that the party's version of Marxism-Leninism had been adapted to Philippine conditions and that its method of armed struggle had been tailored to suit the archipelagic nature of the country.²

The CPP's problems cannot, however, be reduced simply to an echo of international events. The frictions that eventually led to a split in 1993 arose even more urgently from a number of domestic debates: how the party had related to the mass mobilisation in Manila that had brought President Corazon Aquino to office in 1986 and the subsequent reintroduction of democratic government after years of dictatorship; how to build the strength of the NPA; how to construct alliances with middle and upper-class individuals and forces; and how to relate to elections, among others.

There was, of course, a relationship between the international and the domestic: the fall of the Soviet Union led to a questioning of state socialism, a nationalised economy and the concept of

¹ Jose Maria Sison with Rainer Werning, *The Philippine Revolution: The Leader's View*, New York: Crane Russak, 1989, p 104.

² Written exchange with Satur C. Ocampo, conducted by Richard Evans and Shelley Dempsie, Metro Manila, February 5, 1991.

INTRODUCTION

the leading role of the party; and the estrangement of most Eastern Bloc citizens from "their" states raised the relationship between socialism and democracy.

But the crisis that emerged in party ranks in the early 1990s was different from that in, say, Eastern Europe. The CPP was not a ruling party, imposed by Moscow. It contained within its ranks many of the best and bravest activists from two decades, had earned widespread respect even among its detractors, and was largely free of corruption or scandal, having built its numbers through palpable self-sacrifice.

How then to understand the party's marginalisation? As will be discussed in Chapter One, there are two main schools of thought. The first blames moves by sections of the CPP leadership away from the party's founding Maoist orthodoxy of protracted people's war: a patient process of guerilla war leading to the encirclement and taking of Manila. The second, much more heterogenous school finds fault with the orthodoxy itself. Some critics focus on the way in which the CPP practises guerilla warfare; some reject guerillaism in favour of legal activity; others locate the problem in the party's Stalinism, understood as doctrinaire inflexibility.

If there is common ground between the CPP's supporters and critics, it tends to be in the assumption that revolutionary politics is essentially rural and armed, and reformist politics urban and unarmed. Some may support the first strategy, others the latter, but the framework is largely unchallenged.

This thesis takes a different starting point. I argue that the CPP, despite its strategic insistence on the role of armed struggle, shares core political features with its more electorally oriented parent organisation, the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP). I argue further that armed struggle, far from demarcating a fundamentally different orientation, is, like electoral activity, a form of elitist political practice and therefore ultimately interchangeable with legal, electoral politics. I attempt to show how this ambiguity has muddled a series of inner-party debates on military and electoral tactics.

The CPP's strategic emphasis on armed struggle is underpinned by two key assumptions. One is that the mode of production in the Philippines can be usefully described as semifeudal, rather than capitalist, and the second, which flows from the first, is that land reform is of central importance, making the peasantry the most important social class for the revolution. The conclusion which CPP writers have drawn from this analysis is that the Philippine revolution

INTRODUCTION

must take a national democratic, rather than a socialist, form and that the main force of the revolution is a guerilla army recruited primarily from among the peasantry.

This conclusion then feeds back into the conduct and understanding of day-to-day political struggle. Most importantly it underpins a strategy of collaboration between the direct producers (workers and peasants) and other classes (principally the urban middle class and "progressive" sections of the ruling class). This collaboration is deeply cemented with nationalism. I argue that this strategic orientation towards national democratic class collaboration means that the CPP has underestimated the Philippine working class's potential to play a pivotal role in the struggle, above all in the cities.

Despite setbacks here and there, the CPP grew in strength and influence during its first 17 years of existence, faltering only after the events of 1986. Whereas most other writers locate the party's failure in its inability to adapt to those new circumstances, I argue that the CPP's strategy was flawed from the beginning. The dictatorship exercised by President Ferdinand Marcos provided a favourable environment for the CPP to grow despite its inherent political contradictions. The Philippine Left cannot assume that such circumstances will arise again.

Before I elaborate the thesis structure, a note on methodology. This is neither a full history of the party, nor a detailed examination of each of its key texts, nor a journalistic attempt to give the "feel" of party life on the guerilla front line. Others have taken on these tasks admirably.³ It is instead an analytical challenge to the main assumptions underpinning the party's essence.

I visited the Philippines three times in 1991 and 1993 in the course of researching this thesis, interviewing a number of people who were CPP members. For their security, I have not named them when attributing their remarks. The same applies to one interview carried out in Australia.

Another important element of my research was an eight-hour interview on July 8, 1993, in Utrecht, Holland, with Jose Maria Sison, the founder of the CPP. Sison is the party's main theoretician and acknowledges writing early texts under the name Amado Guerrero. He denies, however, being the current chairman of the CPP's Central Committee, Armando Liwanag.

³ See, for example, William Chapman, *Inside the Philippine Revolution: The New People's Army and Its Struggle for Power*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1987; Gregg R. Jones, *Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerrilla Movement*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1989; Joel Rocamora, *Breaking Through: The Struggle Within the Communist Party of the Philippines*, Manila: Anvil, 1994; Kathleen Weekley, *From Vanguard to Rearguard: The Communist Party of the Philippines 1969-1993*, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, August 1996.

INTRODUCTION

We must make it clear that you're interviewing Jose Maria Sison and I will not let the premise pass that it is Jose Maria Sison directly having anything to do with documents of the Communist Party of the Philippines. But in my position as consultant of the National Democratic Front, I may be, in certain cases, knowledgeable about the Communist Party. And that is also to take into account my background which I don't deny.⁴

Most writers on the CPP have stated that they believe that Sison and Liwanag are the same person.⁵ On all the available evidence, including my impressions from the interview, I agree. Given that others have already put this matter in the public arena, and notwithstanding Sison's disclaimer, I intend to treat Sison, Guerrero and Liwanag as interchangeable. Wherever possible, I shall use the name Sison when dealing with the ideas written under any of the three names.

A final comment on terminology. Most terms will be explained as they are used. But some are so prevalent that I note them here. The abbreviation CPP will be used throughout. National democratic (sometimes abbreviated to natdem) refers to all those who subscribe to the national democratic revolution, inside or outside the party. Reaffirmist (sometimes RA) refers to those who agree with Sison's *Reaffirm* document upholding party orthodoxy.⁶ Rejectionist (sometimes RJ) refers to those who reject the document and who, for the most part, split away. Classical Marxism is taken to include the body of ideas built up by Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, Rosa Luxemburg, V. I. Lenin, Leon Trotsky and others. It stands in contradistinction to the ideas developed by those Marxists who supported World War One and by Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong following Lenin's death.

The thesis falls into two parts – chapters one to four, and five to eight. The first part is concerned with the CPP's general political philosophy, the second with case studies that throw critical light on it.

Chapter One examines the continuities and change between the CPP and the PKP. This involves examining how Stalinism became hegemonic among Philippine communists and what is meant by the term. I discuss the concept of the popular front and some theoretical and practical applications. I note how nationalism emerged as a positive goal in the international communist

⁴ Interview with author, Utrecht, July 8, 1993.

⁵ See, for instance, both Rocamora and Weekley, op cit.

INTRODUCTION

movement from the 1930s onwards, as did the idea of revolution by "stages". The chapter concludes with an explanation why the CPP does not represent a qualitative break from the politics of the PKP. An addendum summarises the literature on the crisis in the CPP.

Chapter Two starts with Sison's analysis of the Philippines economy as semifeudal and its implications for the working class and armed struggle. I examine challenges to the semifeudal analysis from the Philippine and international Left and discuss the development of the Philippines from Spanish colony to independent state. In the second part of the chapter, I take up the question of how far the Philippines is independent from its former colonial power, the United States, by examining patterns of trade, ownership and debt. This also involves looking to see what extent there is a Filipino bourgeois class and whether the reality matches the CPP's theory on the "national" and "comprador" wings of the bourgeoisie.

Chapter Three looks at the question of nationalism in more detail. It begins by establishing how the CPP has positioned itself as the party of super-nationalism. It then examines the party's adherence to the line of national democratic revolution and its consequences. The chapter continues by critically examining the ideas of Philippine nationalism. I further argue that while the CPP claims legitimacy for its position from the early writings of the Russian revolutionary Lenin, he fundamentally changed his position in 1917. The chapter concludes by arguing that the concept of nationalism plays a pivotal role in the Philippine communist movement's vacillation between guerillaism and electoralism.

Chapter Four counterposes the classical Marxist and Stalinist traditions on the leading role of the working class. I argue that Sison, following Stalin and Mao, has reduced the working class from a concrete category of people capable of waging their own struggle to a cypher for a military struggle carried out by peasants under the control of urban intellectuals. The chapter also looks at the role of students, arguing that they are particularly well placed to act as the self-sacrificing, conscience of the nation. The chapter then examines the class nature of the Philippines, especially the size and nature of the working class. It looks at the experience of the national democratic trade union federation, the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU or First of May Movement) and argues that despite its militancy and the bravery of its activists, its history, too, suffers from the way that the CPP has cast the working class in a subsidiary role.

⁶ Armando Liwanag, "Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors", *Kasarinlan* 8, no. 1, 1992.

INTRODUCTION

The second section puts the various competing analyses to the test of events. Chapter Five examines the events of the period known as the First Quarter Storm in 1970, which saw an eruption of radicalisation among students and youth, above all in Manila. I look at what role the CPP played in the events, arguing that it enjoyed substantial influence, but that because of its strategic framework it directed radicals to leave the city and political work among the urban poor and the working class to join armed struggle in the countryside.

Chapter Six looks at the years of growth for the CPP. I argue that as early as 1974, the party's strategy of cross-class alliances was producing tensions, tensions that were to re-emerge just four years later in Manila in the party's first crisis over boycotting elections. The next major theoretical debate occurs in 1980-1981, when the party leadership begins to adapt party orthodoxy to incorporate the possibility of "speeding up" the armed struggle and combining it with urban insurrection. A substantial proportion of the chapter is devoted to examining how these new ideas were applied in Mindanao, with both initial success and subsequent tragic consequences. I argue that party activists, restricted by a militarist framework, have been unable to draw meaningful conclusions for strategy.

Chapter Seven moves on to the acid test for the CPP – the downfall of President Marcos in 1986. I argue that the party's politics and strategy prevented it from relating satisfactorily to the mass movement and that the workers who participated did so under middle-class leadership. I look at the arguments around the party's election boycott tactic against the backdrop of the CPP's position on the "national" bourgeoisie and on electoral activity. I argue that the party's failure to take advantage of the events of 1986 did not flow from its election boycott position but from its central theoretical weakness, namely the refusal to put the possibility of independent working class struggle at the centre of its strategy.

Chapter Eight looks at the end game. I look first at why the collapse of European Stalinism had a greater impact on the CPP than expected. I then discuss the worldwide crisis in guerillaism and the reasons for its decline. The chapter concludes with the way that centrifugal forces within the national democratic tradition are playing themselves out.

INTRODUCTION

THREE SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

BEFORE PROCEEDING, this is perhaps a suitable moment to pause and consider how others have understood the origins of the crisis in the CPP. Given that the crisis is relatively recent, and given that many of the key players are still underground or unwilling or fearful to comment too openly on former comrades, the number of sources is still limited. They fall into three camps.

The first comprises documents produced by the CPP (and, it seems, mostly written or heavily influenced by Sison). These writings are loyal to the CPP and its project, and regard the crisis as being brought about by imported, false and misleading ideas. The single most important contribution, *Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors*, was written by party chair Armando Liwanag (Sison) and published on December 26, 1991, as a party document.⁷ It blames a low level of theoretical education within the party for allowing the development of an urban-based strategy of insurrection. It summarises the crisis thus:

The worst deviations and errors arise from petty-bourgeois impetuosity and subjectivism characterized by flights from the concrete conditions and the current strength of the revolutionary forces. It combines wishful thinking for the urban armed urban insurrection with army "regularization". This takes away cadres and resources from mass work in order to build prematurely higher and unsustainable military formations (companies and battalions) and top-heavy staff structures. This is misrepresented as an adjustment on or refinement of the theory and practice of people's war, or as a superior theory or strategy altogether. Now, we are confronted with an unprecedented loss of mass base and other related problems.⁸

The document goes on to say that the wrong line led to a desire to soften the party's control over the National Democratic Front (NDF), a wrong emphasis on urban work, and a too-rapid recruitment that opened the party up to government agents.

The argument is deepened in *General Review of Significant Events and Decisions (1980-1991)*.⁹ This document, issued by the party's Central Committee, as finalised by the Executive

⁷ The document went through various stages. The version published in *Rebolusyon* in January 1993 was adopted by the party's Central Committee in July 1992. It superseded a version endorsed by the Executive Committee of the Central Committee. *Rebolusyon: Theoretical and Political Journal of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines*, Luzon, 1993.

⁸ Quoted in *Kasarinlan: A Philippine Quarterly of Third World Studies*, Quezon City, 8, no. 1, p 85.

⁹ *Debate: Philippine Left Review*, Amsterdam, 7, p 33-95.

INTRODUCTION

Committee of the CC, reiterates in more detail many of the same accusations. It concludes by accusing some leading members of "peddling all sorts of slurs", engaging in "ultrademocracy", gossip and intrigue. "The long-standing and severe neglect and shortcomings in Party building reached a point where the integrity, leadership and processes of the Party were being undermined," it concludes.¹⁰

Further documents designed to bolster the party's orthodoxy include *Stand for Socialism Against Modern Revisionism*, which criticises the Gorbachev years in the Soviet Union and by extension those CPP members who are accused of fostering illusions in the process of perestroika and glasnost;¹¹ *Let Us Celebrate 20 Years of Struggle*, a speech by Luis Jalandoni, the NDF's vice-chairperson for International Affairs, which argues the starting point for understanding the setbacks is a neglect of theoretical education;¹² and *Apropos Carlos Forte's Interview, 'Now the "Real Revolution" Can Begin'*, and *Manifesto of Party Cadres and Members Who Have Repudiated Popoy and His Gang*, both apparently written by party members in Manila-Rizal to defend the theory of people's war against the "renegade" party leader Filemon Lagman (known as Carlos Forte or Popoy).¹³

What all these contributions share is a deep hostility to all those critics within and outside the party who suggest that the orthodoxy, as embodied in the party's founding documents and discussions, could be at fault. If the party has gone through hard times, they say, it is precisely because too many members have broken with that orthodoxy. For these writers, the CPP has a clear and distinct theoretical position that sets it apart both from the PKP tradition and all other current strands of Left thought in the Philippines.

The second and smaller of the camps gives the Philippine government much of the credit for the CPP's failures. Thomas A. Marks, in his *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam*,¹⁴ identifies two factors underlying the CPP's decline into crisis. The first is a shift in the Armed Forces of the Philippines' (AFP) strategy, from 1988 onwards, away from "search and destroy" (what many would call indiscriminate mass terror) to destroying the CPP's infrastructure.¹⁵ The second is the

¹⁰ Ibid, pp 94-95.

¹¹ *Rebolusyon*, 2, pp 1-50.

¹² *Kasarinlan* 8, no. 4, pp 7-15.

¹³ Mentioned in Luis Jalandoni, *Reaping Gains: Rectification Movement Strikes Deep Roots, Grows with Clear Direction*. Speech delivered at CPP 25th anniversary celebration, Utrecht, December 19, 1993.

<http://www.geocities.com/~cpp-ndf/cpp1.htm>.

¹⁴ Thomas A. Marks, *Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam*, London: Frank Cass, 1996.

¹⁵ Ibid, p 134.

INTRODUCTION

expansion of the democratic space after the fall of President Marcos, allowing the government to put itself forward as the defender of the people's interests, rather than the CPP and the NPA.

The result was that in the closing years of the 1980s it was the government, as represented by the military working with civilian authority, which was moving to "eliminate the grievances" even as the CPP opted for gunslinging. As a growing number of individuals returned to areas of greater government presence, they flowed into the militia for self-protection. This was a turning point. So often portrayed as little more than thugs and the dregs of society, the militia became the ultimate Maoist nightmare: the people armed and numerous.¹⁶

While it would be simplistic to reduce the CPP's crisis to this point, more benign government tactics towards the civilian population between 1950 and 1954 under Ramon Magsaysay, first as Secretary of National Defense and then as President, contributed to the marginalisation and eventual defeat of the Huk rebellion.¹⁷

Scott W. Thompson shares a similar position to Marks. He puts forward four factors: the collapse of Communism and the CPP's political demoralisation and isolation; the party's own mistakes, such as its vicious purges (of which more in Chapter Six); improvements in government strategy; and finally a sense that the CPP/NPA could not win.¹⁸ Mark R. Thompson also sees the main reason for the CPP's failure as the re-establishment of democracy in the Philippines from 1986.

Despite all the mistakes CPP-NPA made with regard to alliance-building, the party was still growing until 1986. This suggests that the key variables in explaining the NPA's rise and persistence were the breakdown of Philippine democracy and the advent of Marcos's personalistic dictatorial rule. Similarly, the key reasons for the communists' decline were the dictator's fall from power and subsequent re-democratization.¹⁹

The third and largest camp, not surprisingly, comprises those who – whatever else they may differ on – are united by the opposite view to that of the CPP loyalists: that the party's strict

¹⁶ Ibid, p 137.

¹⁷ Agoncillo, op cit, pp 457-458.

¹⁸ Scott W. Thompson, *The Philippines in Crisis: Development and Security in the Aquino Era*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1992, pp 108-109

¹⁹ Mark R. Thompson, "The Decline of Philippine Communism: A Review Essay", *South East Asia Research* 6, no. 2, 1998, p 128.

INTRODUCTION

adherence to Maoist orthodoxy has strangled what might otherwise have been a vibrant and viable left-wing challenge to the Philippine polity.

Perhaps the single most important publication is an untitled book, published sometime between mid-1992 and mid-1993 by various anonymous party members. It has been dubbed the *Big Red Book* by Philippine academic Joel Rocamora because of its size and colour, a name that has stuck.²⁰ Its contents vary widely. It includes a number of "official" pro-*Reaffirm* documents, but for the most part it is a platform for dissent.

Some contributions, like the "Letter of Concern [to the Central Committee]" from "Concerned Comrades in Mindanao", are almost plaintive. Why, they ask, is the leadership being so unreasonable? "While we are not privy to the dynamics and struggles within the leadership, we perceive deeper problems (internal) that has [sic] to be addressed decisively to preserve the unity of the organization ... Deep within us, this is an honest, open letter of concern for the leadership to consider with the unity of the whole organization in mind."²¹

Others, like the document "Party Unity and Leadership Processes" from the CPP's Standing Group-Visayas Commission, go a little further. But while the Standing Group's paper is consciously critical of the Reaffirmist strategy, it keeps within the bounds of comment about internal democracy and limits itself to calling for a new party congress.²² Then there are documents that clearly question the leadership's line. In "Comments on the Current Polemics Within the Party", an anonymous comrade from Mindanao gives perhaps the clearest indication of the split then brewing:

The Mao model might be the most relevant to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country, which was particularized in the Philippines in PSR, SCPW and OUT [Sison's three key party-building documents]. But at a certain level of development of the revolutionary process faced with a developing revolutionary upsurge and the possibility [sic] of amuration of a revolutionary situation, these documents were found inadequate to provide all guideposts for advancing PPW [Protracted People's War] more effectively and in more specific ways. This is the reason why there was a search for other models which might be able to provide clearer hints and better framework in the search for specific

²⁰ Joel Rocamora, *Breaking Through: The Struggle Within the Communist Party of the Philippines*, Manila: Anvil, 1994, p 117, fn 1.

²¹ *Big Red Book*, no publication details, p 152.

²² *Ibid.*, pp 41-49.

INTRODUCTION

methods in the conjuncture. These considerations must be included for a more encompassing and objective summing-up.²³

Meanwhile, two journals in particular have provided the space for voices critical of the orthodoxy to emerge. The first is *Kasarinlan*, published by the Third World Studies Center at the University of the Philippines. Ka [Comrade] Barry wrote:

On the realm of strategy, the struggle [within the party] has been basically between those who wish to stick to the classical Mao-style "protracted people's war" as elaborated in the earliest Party documents and those who believe that major adjustments have to be made in the light of different conditions and changes in the Philippines and in the international scene. The latter ... advocate a type of people's war that is open to various possibilities – military victory, insurrectionary victory, political settlement, et. al. – and that pursues a more balanced development of military and political work, countryside and urban work, and domestic and international work.²⁴

He goes on to identify a perceived lack of internal party democracy as the other major factor behind the crisis.²⁵ It is a theme that Francisco Nemenzo Jr takes up in the next issue. In an obvious reference to the CPP he writes: "A vanguard that tries to manipulate the people's organizations through a network of cadres who take orders from the party leadership perpetuates the culture of servility instead of preparing the proletariat to assume the initiative and participate as a conscious force in shaping the nation's destiny."²⁶

The second journal is *Debate*, whose first eight issues covered the crucial period of March 1991 to August 1993.²⁷ As with the *Big Red Book*, therefore, many of the contributions intimate the split, rather than explain it. The first article to grapple with the crisis directly was written by Walden Bello in *Debate*. He interviewed 20 activists, 19 of them CPP or NDF members and some in senior positions, and from their responses listed a series of reasons why the party was in crisis. The reasons included: the AFP's effective counter-insurgency operations and a related war-weariness among the NPA's mass base; a mistaken emphasis on the build-up of the NPA's

²³ Ibid, p 162.

²⁴ Ka Barry, "Resist Authoritarian Tendencies Within the Party! Let a Thousand Schools of Thought Contend! – Comments on the Paper 'Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors' by Armando Liwanag", *Kasarinlan* 8, no. 1, p 137.

²⁵ Ibid, p 141.

²⁶ Francisco Nemenzo Jr, "Questioning Marx, Critiquing Marxism – Reflections on the Ideological Crisis of the Left", *Kasarinlan* 8, no. 2, 1992, p 28.

INTRODUCTION

offensive capabilities; the movement's inability to adapt to the new circumstances created by the People Power revolution and its aftermath; the collapse of the regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union; and the "self-inflicted wounds" created by the party's two anti-DPA (deep penetration agent) campaigns, of which more in Chapter Six. Bello drew no general conclusions from this beyond a call for the CPP to acknowledge individual human rights and to renew itself.²⁸

Joel Rocamora took a further step forward in beginning the process of assessing the reasons for the developing split that, by the time of writing (early 1993), was public knowledge. In his article, "The Crisis in the National Democratic Movement and the Transformation of the Philippine Left", he summarises the party's development to that point. In then putting forward four challenges to the Rejectionist camp, he effectively indicates why he feels the CPP went off the rails. The challenges are: 1) To develop a new organisational framework, thus jettisoning the idea that there can be only one Marxist-Leninist party in a given country; 2) To celebrate the party's history – in particular the pluralist policy adopted by the NDF in 1990 (of which much more in Chapter Eight); 3) To repudiate Stalinism and develop an alternative; 4) To move away from tight party control over mass organisations.²⁹ Each challenge is an accusation against the CPP orthodoxy.

These are themes that Rocamora takes further in probably the first book to deal directly with the CPP split, *Breaking Through: The Struggle Within the Communist Party of the Philippines*.³⁰ He makes the point that the CPP suffered with the fall of President Marcos, his defeat robbing the party of a clear enemy who had effectively acted as a recruiting sergeant for national democracy among the urban middle class. What is more, he writes, the CPP is undemocratic and autocratic, and its ideas inflexible and incapable of adapting to new conditions.³¹

This, too, is the essential thesis of Kathleen Weekley in her PhD on the CPP,³² having rehearsed her arguments as "From Vanguard to Rearguard: The Theoretical Roots of the Crisis of the Communist Party of the Philippines" in *The Revolution Falter: The Left in Philippine Politics*

²⁷ It is unclear if the journal published any further issues.

²⁸ Walden Bello, "The Crisis of the Philippine Progressive Movement: A Preliminary Investigation", *Debate* 4, 1992, pp 44-55.

²⁹ Joel Rocamora, "The Crisis in the National Democratic Movement and the Transformation of the Philippine Left", *Debate* 6, 1993, pp 3-60.

³⁰ Joel Rocamora, *Breaking Through: The Struggle Within the Communist Party of the Philippines*, Manila: Anvil, 1994.

³¹ Ibid, in particular see pp 39-40 and 202.

³² Weekley, op cit.

INTRODUCTION

*After 1986.*³³ She writes: "Underlying the argument in this essay is the notion that central aspects of CPP theory and practice that have contributed to its success have also been obstacles to its further development, or, crucial elements in its decline into the present crisis."³⁴ In her doctoral thesis she elaborates the point, while acknowledging that debate had indeed taken place inside the party:

Nevertheless, the gist of my original thesis was strengthened by these findings [of dissent]: the many "adjustments" to strategy were never theorised substantially, nor was the coherence of the basic framework onto which they were being hung ever assessed thoroughly. Until too late, even top intellectual cadres did not articulate the implications of all the minor changes that had been made along the way.³⁵

A third journal that has followed developments is the Sydney-based *Links*. In its first issue, union leader Sonny Melencio criticises the CPP for its Stalinist distortion of the Leninist concept of democratic centralism, a theme recapitulated in the following article by Australian academic Max Lane.³⁶

Vincent Kelly Pollard takes a slightly different approach, placing his main emphasis on the CPP's devaluation of democratic demands coming from those outside its control, and its failure to come to terms with the democratic kernel at the heart of opposition to regimes in the Eastern Bloc, and thus to re-examine and renew its understanding of the kind of socialism for which it stands.³⁷

The most recent contribution, at the time of writing, comes in a book by Ben Reid. He joins those who argue that the CPP's tactical inflexibility led to its isolation in 1986 and therefore to its decline. But he links this in a non-determinist fashion, to the party's misreading of the social reality of the Philippines. While capitalist development post-World War Two was weak,

³³ Kathleen Weekley, "From Vanguard to Rearguard: The Theoretical Roots of the Crisis of the Communist Party of the Philippines", *The Revolution Faltered: The Left in Philippine Politics After 1986*, Patricio Abinales, N., ed. New York: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1996, pp 28-59. Other contributors to this book discuss aspects of the CPP's politics and problems but without attempting to draw out a general theory of its collapse.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p 29.

³⁵ Weekley, PhD thesis, introduction p 8.

³⁶ Sonny Melencio, "Leninism Versus Stalinism: Current Debate in the Communist Party of the Philippines", *Links* 1, 1994, pp 29-42. Max Lane, "Communist Party of the Philippines: Background to the Split", pp 43-56.

INTRODUCTION

compared to South Korea or Taiwan, for example, it was strong enough to lay the basis for a strong urban challenge to Marcos and to undercut a simple model of tenancy on the land. Thus a Maoist model based on peasant organising did not fit reality: the CPP's defence of its orthodoxy on this point contributed to its general inflexibility.³⁸

As argued earlier, if there is a common theme to these critics of the CPP it is that the party has faltered or worse because of its dogmatic adherence to Maoist-style Stalinism – understood as a minimum of internal democratic procedures, an unwillingness or even a fear of contesting its earlier theories, and a dogged determination to hang on to a strategy of protracted people's war when circumstances suggest that alternatives might be needed. Usually implicit in these criticisms is that a rebirth of democracy on the Left is the major requirement for advance.

The basis of my thesis is the argument that neither side in the debate has grasped the fundamental flaws that have led to crisis and division. While the Reaffirmists are wrong to claim that cleaving to orthodoxy would have prevented disaster, the Rejectionists are deluding themselves to believe that the failings of the Philippine Stalinist tradition can be reduced to a lack of democracy. As I will argue, it is further factors inherited from the PKP that characterise Stalinism – the belief in revolution by stages, the acceptance of the idea of socialism in one country, popular frontism, uncritical adoption of nationalism, change from above. Insofar as these ideas have been transmitted on to the new, post-CPP groupings, the tragedy has the potential to reproduce itself.³⁹

Two contributions to the debate at least hint at a different framework. As discussed earlier, Kerkvliet is open to the idea of a continuity in strategy and philosophy between the PKP and the CPP. Melencio goes further in *Links*. There he repeatedly blames the CPP leadership's failure to take the struggle forward on its narrow obsession with guerilla struggle.

The CPP leadership's view was that the genuine anti-dictatorship struggle was already being waged through armed struggle in the countryside. So the workers could go on with the economic struggles, the students could go on with the anti-US bases

³⁷ Vincent Kelly Pollard, "Democratizing the Philippine Revolution: Squaring the Circle for the Communist Party of the Philippines", *Fourth Annual Graduate Student Conference on Hawai'i, Asia and the Pacific: Conference Proceedings*. University of Hawai'i, 1992.

³⁸ Ben Reid, *Philippine Left: Political Crisis and Social Change*, Manila: Journal of Contemporary Asia Publishers, 2000.

³⁹ See, for instance, the position taken by Sergio Tubongbanwa, "'Stalinist Distortions' and Their Implications for the Philippine Left", *Debate* 2, 1992, pp 40-41.

INTRODUCTION

campaign ... because guerrilla warfare was ... [leading to victory] through an insurrection in Metro Manila which would combine with the guerrilla forces marching to the palace to seize power.⁴⁰

Instead, Melencio argues that post-CPP revolutionaries need to build a new party, one that can "lead the working class masses in a political offensive to seize political power – that is, to install the class (not the party) in power".⁴¹

With this comment in mind, we now turn to a critique of the CPP's key theoretical foundations.

⁴⁰ Sonny Melencio, "Twenty-six Years of Struggle: Lessons and Prospects for the Philippine Left", *Links* 8, 1997, p 13.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p 23.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

INTRODUCTION

THE COMMUNIST Party of the Philippines (CPP) was established on December 26, 1968, with the explicit aim of reviving the theory and practice of armed struggle – guerilla warfare – within the archipelago as a means of achieving “national-democratic revolution, a revolution seeking the liberation of the Filipino people from foreign and feudal oppression and exploitation”¹ and opening the road to socialist transformation.²

Its founder, Jose Maria Sison, had climbed to prominence during the decade as a member of the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), but parted company over what he regarded as the party's reluctance to engage in revolutionary struggle. Within months, in March 1969, the new party had formed its armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), with Bernabe Buscayno, who had led one of the last remnants of the PKP's armed forces, as military commander. For Sison, the army was the vehicle for transforming Philippine society:

Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. Not until the counter-revolutionary armed forces, including foreign aggressor troops, puppet troops and all kinds of murder gangs, have been destroyed can the independent regime in the countryside or the people's democratic state system throughout the country be established.³

¹ Amado Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution, Specific Characteristics of Our People's War, and Our Urgent Task[s]*, Oakland: International Association of Filipino Patriots, 1979, p 129.

² December 26, 1968, was the official date – Mao Zedong's birthday. Deliberations began in reality on January 3, 1969, because of security fears, with just 12 men present, all of whom were “elected” to the Central Committee, according to Gregg. R. Jones, *Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerrilla Movement*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1989, pp 17-19.

³ Guerrero, p 163. Guerrero was the *nom de guerre* of Jose Maria Sison. From this point onwards, I shall refer to Sison in the main body of the text, rather than to Guerrero.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

For first tens and hundreds, and later thousands, of young Filipinos, the renewed armed struggle seemed to offer a way of bringing down the regime of President Ferdinand Marcos, especially once martial law was introduced in 1972. Building the CPP was a direct and hostile challenge to the PKP's remaining influence. The new generation was scornful of the old party, which had effectively abandoned a strategy of armed struggle with the collapse of the Huk rebellion in the mid-1950s (see below).

It was this retreat that fuelled the split between the old guard and Sison's circle. To the young radicals, the party must have indeed seemed "a brotherhood of tired old men",⁴ with little popularity, little organisation, and little will to fight. Sison, on the other hand, saw the Philippine revolution following a similar path to the Chinese. Unlike the PKP, which toyed only briefly with the idea of a guerilla road to victory, the CPP under Sison saw military hegemony as not only achievable but utterly indispensable. It captured a mood among the youth. Jose F. Lacaba wrote:

And yet, however I feel about it, it is here, the Revolution we have all been yakking about at genteel cocktail parties, the Revolution we say we have been waiting for, the Revolution we say we are not ready for. It is here, baby, though we may not feel its effects just yet; it is here and it is time to stop talking of it as a remote possibility in the distant future because it is of now; it is time to stop looking for it in places like Indios Bravos because the indios bravos are up in the hills ... They may end up like the Huks of the '50s. They may not succeed. But their Revolution, the armed struggle, has begun.⁵

There appeared to be a rapidly expanding gulf of unbridgeable proportions between the old and the new, not simply generational but fiercely political. By 1974, a PKP partisan like William J. Pomeroy, an American who had fought as a Huk, was prepared not only to blame the CPP for giving President Ferdinand Marcos an excuse to impose martial law, but also to accuse them of being stooges of the CIA.⁶ When the PKP capitulated to Marcos in a "Memorandum of

⁴ William Chapman, *Inside the Philippine Revolution: The New People's Army and Its Struggle for Power*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1987, p 72.

⁵ Jose F. Lacaba, "Don't Look Now, But the Revolution...", *Philippines Free Press*, August 16 and August 23, 1969.

⁶ William J. Pomeroy, *An American Made Tragedy: Neo-colonialism and Dictatorship in the Philippines*, New York: International Publishers, 1974, p 129 and p 138.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

Cooperation" dated October 1, 1974, abandoning the notion of armed struggle in return for readmission to the mainstream,⁷ the division between the two parties was complete.

In its preface to Sison's *Philippine Society and Revolution*, the International Association of Filipino Patriots, a national-democratic solidarity organisation operating in the US and Canada, could dismiss the dog days of the PKP in a few terse sentences thus:

"Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary practice." This Leninist dictum was the painful lesson absorbed by the leaders of the present day national-democratic movement who grew up literally groping for a revolutionary alternative in the fifties and early sixties – the dark age of the Philippine Left, when a combination of strategic confusion, organizational degeneration, and counterrevolutionary repression had practically dismantled the people's movement.⁸

The discontinuity appears deep and irreversible. However, the aim of this chapter is to challenge the superficially attractive assumption that the CPP represents a fundamentally different version of Filipino communism. The point is important. If the CPP represents a qualitative break with the politics of the PKP then the CPP's subsequent failures need to be located within those theoretical and practical positions that demarcate it from the earlier party.

This is essentially the position taken by Kathleen Weekley in her recent PhD thesis on the CPP's decline. She argues that the CPP's failures in 1986, and after, flow from its rigid dogmatic framework – a framework set up in counterposition to the PKP's. She sketches the rise and fall of the PKP, its turns from urban work to armed struggle and back to (frustrated) parliamentarism, without drawing any parallels with the CPP's later trajectory.⁹

If there is a continuity between the two parties, then it may instead be possible to argue that they share a common fault that helps explain their common plight. This is the argument of the present thesis. I intend to show that both the PKP and CPP incorporated from the Stalinised world communist movement the strategy of collaboration with the "national bourgeois" to make a national democratic revolution. This in turn marginalised the working class in favour of the peasantry as the main agent of change and incorporated nationalism into the parties'

⁷ Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *History of the Filipino People*, Quezon City: R. P. Garcia, 1990, p 577.

⁸ Guerrero, p ii.

⁹ Kathleen Weekley, *From Vanguard to Rearguard: The Communist Party of the Philippines 1969-1993*, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, August 1996.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

ideological armoury. As a strategy, it was and continues to be compatible with either an electoral or guerillaist mode of struggle.

One writer who has acknowledged such a continuity between the PKP and the CPP is Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet. He argues that questions of strategy and tactics, the balance between rural and urban work, and the nature of democracy in the communist movement,

have been lurking within the CPP and NPA for some time. Moreover, they are reminiscent of debates in earlier eras of communist party and underground leftist struggles in the Philippines.¹⁰

Later, referring to shifts in communist practice, including the alternation between armed and legal struggle, he concludes:

In other words, since the early years of the country's communist parties, leaders have frequently disagreed on several key issues and majority positions have flip-flopped on numerous occasions. From this history one can readily imagine the flip-flopping will continue.¹¹

Kerkvliet's insight is valuable. He does not, however, attempt to explain why such a continuity might exist. This chapter will argue that both parties have shared a core theoretical position that first allowed the PKP to switch from legal work to armed struggle and back to legal work, and that would now allow the CPP, or breakaway fragments, to make the switch in reverse. This theoretical unity stems, I will argue, from their common Stalinist heritage—one that denies the independent, self-conscious revolutionary activity of the working class.

To establish such an overriding continuity involves three steps. First, I intend to demonstrate that the PKP emerged into a political framework already established by the needs of the Soviet Union, as expressed through the policies of the Communist International (Comintern).¹² Second, I will establish that although the PKP was a reluctant, belated and temporary convert to the idea

¹⁰ Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, "Contemporary Philippine Leftist Politics in Historical Perspective", *The Revolution Falters: The Left in Philippine Politics After 1986*, Patricio N. Abinales, ed., New York: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1996, p 11.

¹¹ Ibid, p 16.

¹² For an account of how the Comintern degenerated from an instrument of world socialist revolution to the foreign policy wing of the Soviet communist party, see Duncan Hallas, *The Comintern*, London: Bookmarks, 1985.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

of armed insurrection, it did not have to abandon its main platform at any point in the process of taking up armed struggle. Third, I will argue that despite its more militant posture, the CPP has trodden a similar ideological path, and that it or the groupings that have split from it are therefore capable of moving between armed struggle and a parliamentary form of popular front politics. I will flesh out this third theme in following chapters.

THE WORLD ACCORDING TO STALIN

BY THE time the PKP was established on August 26, 1930, under the aegis of the Comintern, Stalinism was in the saddle in Moscow.¹³ Given that support for, or hostility towards, Stalinism proved to be a significant factor in the CPP's split, as shall be discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight, it is worth pausing a moment to consider the term.

Among party loyalists, association with Stalin's heritage has few, if any, pejorative connotations. In the context of the inner-party debate, defence of Stalin is associated with the party's long-term theoretical orthodoxy, and with support for state control of the economy and the leading role of the party. He is explicitly ranged among the pantheon of the CPP's role models.

We are still in the era of imperialism and proletarian revolution as defined by Lenin. This is true especially because of the revisionist betrayal and capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union and other former socialist countries. The teachings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao about classes and class struggle remain valid to this day ... Long live Lenin and Stalin!¹⁴

For critics, Stalinism has an equally simple nature. It refers to authoritarianism. As a Filipina who was a CPP member between 1974 and 1995, and who is now a critic of CPP orthodoxy, puts it:

¹³ According to Alfredo B. Saulo, *Communism in the Philippines: An Introduction*, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1990, p 174, the PKP did not formally join the Comintern until 1935, but initial non-membership seems to have made no difference to the party's political trajectory.

¹⁴ Armando Liwanag, *Long Live Lenin and Stalin, Condemn the Modern Revisionists, Resume the Proletarian Revolution* message from the CPP Central Committee, November 8, 1996. <http://www.geocities.com/~cpp-nd/cpp15.htm>. Liwanag is in fact Sison, a question addressed in the introduction.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

It's a term that has been historically used to describe people who use dogmatic and rigid implementation of political ideology – in this case, the Marxist-Leninist ideology.¹⁵

Both these definitions seem woefully inadequate – the first ignoring the dictatorship over the proletariat that was the reality of the Stalin era, the second missing the way that Stalinism was not just dogmatism but a complete ideology. A better starting point would be that Stalinism is that body of ideas developed by Joseph Stalin, general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and his supporters which reflected the isolation and economic degeneration of post-revolutionary Russia and in turn which justified the rule and the methods of the Soviet bureaucracy.¹⁶

Arising out of the isolation and disintegration of the October 1917 revolution, Stalinism was counterposed to the ideas of V. I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky on a number of issues, but the most important was "socialism in one country". Where Lenin and Trotsky argued that a successful Russian revolution would have to spread internationally, not least because the backward nature of Russian society meant there was no material abundance which was the prerequisite for building a socialist society based on workers' democracy, Stalin argued that the Soviet Union had to retreat into virtual autarchy, developing an advanced industrial base at the expense of the working class and the peasantry, rather than for their benefit. The political corollary was the development of a strong, centralised, dictatorial state to supervise this process of superexploitation. Internationalism in the communist movement became reduced to the defence of this new Russian ruling class.¹⁷

The consequences for the embryonic workers' and communist movements in the colonial countries were severe. The Soviet bureaucracy's interests increasingly centred around stability and security. This necessitated an attempt to build alliances with at least some Western, colonialist powers. World revolution in either word or deed would not sit easily with such new friends and so Stalin's regime began to argue that socialist revolution was off the practical agenda. The best that militants in the colonies could aspire to was the first "stage", namely national democratic

¹⁵ Interview in Melbourne, November 16, 1997. Despite her lengthy party membership, the interviewee admitted that she had been "exposed" to Stalin only after moving to Australia in 1989. This is a reflection on the low level of political education within the CPP, one the party leadership around Sison bewails but for which it clearly must share part of the responsibility. See also Communist Party of the Philippines, Manila-Rizal Regional Committee, "Declaration of Autonomy", *Kasarinlan* 9, no. 1, 1993.

¹⁶ See John Molyneux, *What is the Real Marxist Tradition?*, London: Bookmarks, 1988, pp 41-53.

¹⁷ For a concise summary of this process see Peter Binns, Tony Cliff, Chris Harman, *Russia: From Workers' State to State Capitalism*, London: Bookmarks, 1987.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

revolution. The implications of such a position are discussed in section two, below. The point here is that by 1930 this was the orthodoxy for millions of communists.

A stroke effectively put Lenin out of politics during 1922. His death in January 1924 cleared the way for an even more vigorous rewriting of communist theory by Stalin. Although the first contact with the communist movement came in 1924 when Harrison George, a leading member of the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA), visited the Philippines and spoke to a number of labour leaders, the visit was brief and was aimed primarily at persuading a number of unionists to attend a Comintern-run conference in Canton.¹⁸ By the time more systematic contact was made, from 1927 onwards,¹⁹ the authority of the Comintern line of "socialism in one country" was firmly established.

The PKP gained its legitimacy through its links to Moscow; the CPP was to draw its theoretical basis from Beijing. By the late 1960s, China and the Soviet Union were rivals. As a result, many writers have emphasised the hostility between the two centres of official Communism. For the purposes of this thesis, it is their shared ideology that is important. While the Chinese leader, Mao Zedong, had developed new tactics to gain victory in 1949, his essential framework was still Stalin's: class collaboration ("the block of four classes") in the name of national democracy.²⁰ As a result, while the CPP looked to the Chinese party for inspiration in rivalry with Moscow, the ideas inherited and developed by Sison and his comrades stood within the Stalinist tradition. The implications of this will begin to be drawn out in Chapter Two.

Stalinist hegemony brought new terms into the socialist lexicon, among them three of particular importance to communist parties, such as the PKP, operating in the colonial world. They are worth exploring here because, as I will proceed to argue, they are concepts that the CPP went on to inherit.

¹⁸ Saulo, op cit, pp 10-11. George's real name was William Janequette, according to Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines*, Manila: Random House, 1989, p 337.

¹⁹ Saulo, op cit, pp 13-14. Antonio S. Araneta records that the first communist organisation in the Philippines was founded among Chinese workers in Manila in 1926. The first Comintern document dealing with the Philippines was published on May 22, 1927. *The Communist Party of the Philippines and the Comintern, 1919-1930*. PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1966, pp 97-101.

²⁰ Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-Tung*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971, pp 134-135. Of course, once in power, Mao moved against the private bourgeoisie, illustrating the difference between Stalinism in and out of power.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

1) The Popular Front: my enemy's enemy is my friend

THE DEFEAT of the 1925-27 Chinese revolution and the massacre of thousands of worker militants and party cadres confirmed the isolation of the Soviet Union.²¹ The victory of Nazism in Germany in 1933 made the search for allies an urgent one. By now the Soviet bureaucracy scorned any prospect of workers' revolution in the West (and indeed, as the Spanish revolution of 1936 was to show, was prepared to wreck any possibility of one.²²) New allies, therefore, would have to come from among the ranks of the existing capitalist states. France and Britain, the major powers most threatened by Nazi Germany, had to be assiduously courted. The United States was now also a potential bulwark against the Axis powers.

It was within this framework that the strategy of the popular front was developed.²³ The Soviet Union could no longer be seen to be fomenting revolutionary class conflict within the borders of potential allies. Communists outside the borders of the USSR had to be convinced that the defence of the "socialist motherland" required new friendships among those disdained until so recently as mere reformists, or worse. As the seventh, and final, world congress of the Comintern declared in mid-1935:

The concentration of forces against the chief instigators of war at any given moment (at the present time – against fascist Germany and against Poland and Japan, which are in league with it) constitutes a most important tactical task ... the establishment of a unity front with social-democratic and reformist organisations ... with mass national liberation, religious-democratic and pacifist organisation and their adherents, is of decisive importance for the struggle against war and its fascist instigators in all countries.²⁴

There was an alternative, one posed by Trotsky drawing on Lenin's writings following the 1917 revolution in Russia – the united front. While the popular front was about building an alliance

²¹ The defeat was largely a result of Stalin's disastrous advice to the Chinese Communist Party. But the sense of embattlement it brought to the Soviet Union ironically led to Stalin's hand being strengthened domestically and internationally. See Charlie Hore, *The Road to Tiananmen Square*, London: Bookmarks, 1991, pp 13-28; Hallas, op cit, pp 118-122.

²² See Felix Morrow, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*, New York: Pathfinder, 1974, especially pp 240-51.

²³ The term "popular front" gained particular currency with the electoral successes of Popular Front coalitions in France and Spain in 1936.

²⁴ Hallas, op cit, p 143. Talk of a popular front approach also reflected organic moves to unity among left activists in Western Europe and elsewhere in the face of the rise of Nazism. Stalin thus used a healthy sentiment for united action among workers to introduce a quite different unity, that with sections of the middle and ruling classes.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

across class lines, the united front was about unity between different sections of the working class, the better to fight Nazism and the capitalist system from which it sprang.²⁵ Because of the enormous prestige of the CPSU and its control of the overwhelming bulk of the world communist movement, and because those who wanted to fight fascism seemed to have little alternative, it was popular frontism which became hegemonic on the Left.

The difference was far from semantic. The PKP was established by trade unionists like printer Crisanto Evangelista, founding general secretary in 1906 of the Union de Impresores de Filipinas (UIF),²⁶ and Antonio D. Ora, founder in 1922 of the Marxist-oriented Partido Obrero de Filipinas (Philippine Workers' Party)²⁷ and founding chair in 1929 of the Katipunan ng mga Anakpawis sa Pilipinas (KAP or Association of the Sons of Sweat of the Philippines).²⁸ Significantly, the UIF took as its motto the Marxist slogan "The emancipation of the workers must be achieved by the workers themselves"²⁹ – this just five years after the first batch of socialist literature³⁰ had arrived in the Philippines.³⁰

The PKP was founded as an initiative of the KAP at the Templo del Trabajo (Temple of Labour) in Manila, with its formal declaration on November 7, 1930, taking place in front of some 6000 workers at Plaza Moriones in Tondo – the heart of the working-class section of the city.³¹ These worker leaders' grasp of theory may sometimes have been rudimentary, but their life experience as working-class militants led them to embrace the simple proposition at the heart of classical Marxism that the working class was the agent of social revolution.

That, of course, was not the whole story. The impact of the Stalinisation of the world communist movement was already having an effect. The years covering the formation of the PKP, its early agitation, and the jailing or banishment or both of 20 party leaders by 1933 were designated by the Comintern worldwide as the "Third Period", one of rising revolutionary struggles. The concept had no general basis in fact and was aimed to give a spurious left-wing credibility to Stalin during the early years of superexploitation under the Five Year Plans and of

²⁵ Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, Pathfinder, New York, 1977, especially pp 132-41.

²⁶ Saulo, op cit, p 7.

²⁷ James S. Allen, *The Radical Left on the Eve of War: A Political Memoir*, Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1985, p 6.

²⁸ Saulo, op cit, p 17.

²⁹ Ibid, p 8.

³⁰ Ibid, p 4.

³¹ Ibid, p 18 and Allen, op cit, p 7. Araneta, op cit, says the police recorded 5000 at the ceremony, while the party claimed 50,000, with 3000 joining on the spot, p 189.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

forced collectivisation. In the advanced countries, communists were instructed to denounce their social democratic fellows as "social fascists", causing huge division in the workers' movement.³²

In the Philippines, the impact of the Comintern line seems to have been less damaging. That is not to deny that it could be a liability. The PKP turned its back on the radical nationalist Sakdalista movement that flourished in the early 1930s and that spawned an insurrectionary movement in central Luzon in May 1935.³³ In similar vein, Evangelista, appealing against his imprisonment as the party was being forced underground, baldly stated to the Supreme Court that "reformism" under capitalism is ... tantamount to betrayal of the cause of the workers³⁴ – effectively rejecting in advance any hope of winning the more moderate Socialist Party (SP) to a united defence of civil liberties.

But there was no social democratic party of the Western type. The SP was small, peasant-based, and until the mid-'30s very loosely organised.³⁵ More importantly, the PKP's "class on class" rhetoric and emphasis on workers' immediate revolutionary potential appears to have fitted with the mood on the ground. According to the PKP, its trade union grouping, the KAP, could claim the support of 27 of the 35 unions that made up the earlier labour federation from which it had split. After party founder Ora died while in police custody on January 16, 1931, "more than 50,000 workers marched through the streets of Manila with red flags and antiimperialist slogans".³⁶ Whether or not these figures were inflated, it was still the case that the new party had been born in a period of high struggle resulting from the first impact of the Depression.³⁷ It threw its meagre resources into the fight.

In Iloilo City [in 1930] ... some five hundred railroad workers struck for higher wages and better working conditions. This was immediately followed by a walkout staged by some three thousand Iloilo stevedores, who were later reinforced in [sic] the picket line by 700 sugar and oil plant workers.

³² Hallas, op cit, pp 123-138.

³³ Renato Constantino, with Letizia R. Constantino., *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*. Manila: No publisher, 1989, pp 373-377.

³⁴ Saulo, op cit, p 23.

³⁵ An indication of its looseness is that it is variously supposed to have been founded in 1929, 1932 and 1933. Ibid, p 173.

³⁶ Quoted in ibid, p 20. Constantino, op cit, reports a more conservative figure of 10,000, p 368.

³⁷ Constantino, op cit, lists an impressive array of strikes from 1925 onwards on the waterfront, among factory workers and transport workers, and among other groups, p 370.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

In Fabrica, Negros Occidental, about 15,000 laborers walked out on the Insular Lumber Mills, forcing the management to call in the constabulary to maintain peace and order in the plant. The communists in Manila, eager to win the goodwill of Iloilo and Negros strikers, passed a resolution assuring them of the CPP's [PKP's] moral and financial support.

... the newly born CPP redoubled its propaganda and organizational efforts, keeping all its frontline cadres busy, holding public meetings "almost daily" from 7 November 1930 to 2 February 1931.³⁸

This is not the place to go into a more detailed consideration of the PKP's activities. The key point here is that the PKP was founded of the working class and for the working class – not a class reduced to an abstract slogan but a concrete social force, organised (at least partly) in Manila and some other areas.³⁹ The practice might have been hampered by inexperience, but it reflected an initial subjective commitment to revolutionary socialist struggle.⁴⁰ The advent of popular frontism changed all that.

There are a series of indicators that show the qualitative shift in the PKP's orientation and practice. So, whereas Evangelista and other comrades jailed in 1933 had earlier disdainfully refused offers of clemency from the Malacanang presidential palace, an official of the American CP, James S. Allen,⁴¹ convinced them in 1936 that the new line of the popular front made compromise acceptable and necessary. They were freed on New Year's Eve "in the belief that fascism, not the local bourgeois government, is the 'main enemy' of communism in this period".⁴² The PKP reversed its line on President Manuel Quezon, albeit grudgingly. He went from being the leader of a "growing military-fascist dictatorship"⁴³ to a potential ally against the Japanese.⁴⁴

³⁸ Saulo, *op cit*, pp 19-20.

³⁹ So, for example, the PKP's underground leadership in 1936, while the frontline leadership was banished, included a sailor, the leader of the largest tobacco workers' union, and a leader of the waterfront workers. Allen, *op cit*, p 12.

⁴⁰ This is not to say that it ignored the peasantry. Peasant organisations were present at the founding meeting and the party gave solidarity to the 1931 Tayug uprising. See Saulo, *op cit*, p 20.

⁴¹ Allen was a party name. His real name was Sol Auerbach. Allen p 71.

⁴² Saulo, *op cit*, p 174.

⁴³ *ibid*, p 174.

⁴⁴ For instance, Quezon's representative was welcomed to the PKP-SP merger convention in October 1938. Allen, *op cit*, p 57.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

The shift culminated in the merger, formally declared on November 7, 1938, with the SP, led by Pedro Abad Santos.⁴⁵ While the PKP had been founded in the image of the Comintern and (as far as its members were concerned) in the spirit of the Bolshevik revolution, Santos formed the SP as a vehicle for reform, albeit muscular and militant, on behalf of the peasantry.

Inevitably, joining with the SP pointed towards a watering down of the PKP's position. Abad Santos himself came from a comfortable Pampangan family, practised as a lawyer and was an active freemason.⁴⁶ According to journalist and author Eduardo Lachica, Luis Taruc, the peasant activist recruited by Abad Santos as SP general secretary in 1935 and who helped turn a ramshackle organisation into a functioning party, described his mentor as a "Marxist but not a Bolshevik". Lachica added:

It is doubtful if Don Perico [as Abad Santos was known] was even a Marxist. His favorites were Norman Thomas and Leon Blum, both non-Marxists, and he greatly admired the socialism of President Cardenas of Mexico.⁴⁷

Although it seems that the PKP dominated the merger with the SP (the merger party was still known as the Communist Party and PKP members outnumbered SP members at the time of the founding conference by 1200 to 300⁴⁸), its willingness to accept an alliance with a party it had previously scorned as "anarchistic, too lazy to read Marxist literature and prone to violence"⁴⁹ indicated how far it had softened its stance. Tellingly, the 1938 merger party's constitution hailed the contribution to the 1896 revolution made by middle-class figures like Burgos, Rizal and Luna – the same figures reviled as "sell-outs" in the party's founding constitution in 1930.⁵⁰

The change in the PKP's line led to a sea change in its theorisation of the relationship between the immediate struggle and the fight for socialism, as we shall see in the next section. It involved a transformation in strategy and therefore in the party's understanding of how the working class should relate to the peasantry, the urban middle class and at least sections of the Philippine ruling class. To put the PKP's new approach into context, we need to consider the second element of the Stalinist orthodoxy.

⁴⁵ The merger was preceded by a formal pact in 1936 and by some joint work dating back as far as 1934. *Ibid*, p 15 and p 48.

⁴⁶ Eduardo Lachica, *Huk: Philippine Agrarian Society in Revolt*, Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1971, pp 84-86.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p 85.

⁴⁸ Allen, *op cit*, p 58.

⁴⁹ Saulo, *op cit*, p 28.

2) One stage at a time

A LOGICAL corollary of popular frontism was that the struggle for socialism was to be postponed until after the main battle had been fought. The argument of the Second International ⁵¹ had been resurrected – that the fight for socialism in underdeveloped countries should be postponed until capitalism had flourished and laid the basis for its own overthrow. As we shall see in Chapter Four, Lenin had argued that international revolution made workers' power possible even in backward Russia. Popular frontism threw out Lenin's theory even while Stalin's communist parties were wrapping themselves in Lenin's mantle.

The communist movement accordingly adopted the concept of stages. The first stage – the winning of national liberation – involved unity across classes for the common, national good. Only once this national democratic stage had been achieved could the workers and their supporters move on to fight for socialism. It is not clear when the PKP formally adopted such a position, but it had certainly done so no later than the end of the 1930s. The fact that commentators on the PKP appear not to have remarked on the party's espousal of "stages" indicates just how much the Stalin line was taken for granted from the 1930s on.

The stageist position came with a price ticket attached, as the party increasingly found itself having to satisfy both its supporters among the working class and the peasantry and its new middle and upper-class allies. The PKP's attempt to maintain this balancing act coloured the period from 1936 until the outbreak of war in 1941. Allen, effectively the Comintern's agent in the Philippines during the crucial period, describes the anguished debate in 1938 over his proposal that the PKP should dump its remaining inhibitions and come fully in line with international communist policy:

The activists ... could not be easily convinced ... The party had always stood for full and immediate national independence, including withdrawal of all US military and naval forces, repudiation of the debt to the United States, and confiscation of all big foreign enterprises. They had denounced Quezon and his Nacionalista Party as traitors to the

⁵⁰ Ibid, p 3.

⁵¹ The Second International was an international grouping of Marxist parties, established in 1889. It was an effective force until it backed World War One, alienating hundreds of thousands of erstwhile supporters by 1917-1919.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

independence cause. As leaders of the mass labor and peasant movements they fought the very classes that leaned upon and supported US imperialism. They challenged the privileged position of these classes by demanding the confiscation of the big estates ...

Now they were being asked to hold in abeyance the demand for immediate independence from the United States and to adjust aspects of their domestic program to favor a democratic front policy directed against Japanese imperialism and its internal supporters ... From early Spanish days to the present Japan had been viewed as an offsetting power to the prevailing colonial regimes with their virulent racism and brutalities. The danger of Japan had been used too often to divert and obfuscate the struggle for independence ... As recently as 1935 the Communists and other independence activists had campaigned against the establishment of the Commonwealth [partial self-government under US control], accusing the Nacionalista leaders of seeking permanent US sovereignty using the Japanese danger as a cloak.⁵²

The Comintern line won the day, but the party was irrevocably changed. Now, in the foreign policy interests of the USSR, communists found themselves defending US imperialism as kinder and gentler than its Japanese variant. They were forced to advocate alliances with whichever Philippine upper-class figures were hostile to Japan or who could be won over to such a position. Yet the late 1930s saw a sharpening of class struggle, with peasants and workers mobilised by immediate concerns rather than international politics. As Allen himself recorded:

The Philippines was at the height of a strike wave which began early in the Depression decade. Workers walked out of the tobacco and other industrial enterprises, in transportation and on the docks for higher wages, the eight-hour day, the right to organize and other demands.

The struggle was even more acute on the *haciendas* including those belonging to the church and the friar orders. The burning of crops by the peasants, rice marches on provincial towns and the seizure of food supplies in the plantation *bodegas* were not uncommon. Bloody clashes occurred between peasants fighting eviction and the private armed gangs of the big landowners.⁵³

⁵² Allen, *op cit*, pp 45-46.

⁵³ *Ibid*, pp 52-53. Kerkvliet records that the total number of reported incidents on the land rose from 25 in 1934 to 87 in 1937, then soaring to 108 in 1938, 176 in 1939, and 179 in 1940. Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines*, Quezon City: New Day, 1986, pp 40-41.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

The party was pulled in two sharply different directions. On the one hand, it continued to build militant, mass organisations among radicalising workers and peasants. These were facing increasingly violent opposition, especially from landlords in Luzon, some of whom were creating private armies and flirting with fascism.⁵⁴ The PKP had significant success. As historians Renato and Letizia Constantino put it:

By the end of 1938, there were some forty organizations of peasants and rural workers, most of them, however, concentrated in central Luzon. Although not all these groups were under Communist leadership, the larger and more militant ones were. The General Workers Union (AMT) which united 50,000 workers from Pampanga, Bulacan, Tarlac, and Nueva Ecija was under the leadership of Socialists and Communists. The Philippine Confederation of Peasants (KPMP) with 60,000 members, was led by a CPP Politburo member, Juan Feleo, and the 80,000-strong Katipunan ng Anak Pavis (KAP) was likewise under Communist leadership.⁵⁵

On the other hand, the PKP was searching for respectable allies against fascism. In 1937 it joined the Popular Front, alongside the SP, a number of left-wing unions and peasant organisations, the Aglipayan Church,⁵⁶ and some professional groups.⁵⁷ The nature and history of the Popular Front seems extraordinarily complicated. Saulo says (pp 174-175) that the SPP launched a Popular Front movement as early as 1935, in alliance with the mainstream Democrata and Reformista parties and a pro-Japanese group. Then in December 1936, a Popular Front party was organised against the "growing military-fascist dictatorship" of President Quezon. It split between factions led by the SPP and the Democrata Party in 1937, the year the PKP joined – presumably accepting by now that the Japanese, not Quezon, were the main enemy. It went on to organise anti-Hitler rallies alongside such non-radical bodies as the Civilian Emergency Administration, Young Philippines, the Nacionalista Party, the Civil Liberties Union and others.⁵⁸ It is unclear what compromises were made to bring such new allies along side.

One way of allowing the party's supporters to vent their feelings in a way that would not alienate new-found allies was participation in electoral activity. The PKP had already flirted with

⁵⁴ Constantino, *op cit*, pp 377-387.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p 384.

⁵⁶ Named after Gregorio Aglipayan, head bishop of the Philippine Independent Church. Allen, *op cit*, p 15.

⁵⁷ Constantino, *op cit*, p 387.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p 389.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

elections after it was effectively legalised in October 1937. Two leading members, Mariano P. Balgos and Guillermo Capadocia, stood unsuccessfully for the Philippine Assembly.⁵⁹ In the 1940 provincial and municipal elections, the party and the Popular Front made a much more serious challenge, with a degree of success.

Predictably, the results were most heartening for the Popular Front in Pampanga where the incumbent Governor Sotero Baluyot barely managed to win over Pedro Abad Santos [by then vice-chair of the merged PKP-SP] despite the fact that the former had the strength of the Nacionalista Party behind him and 50% of Abad Santos' followers were not qualified voters. Abad Santos obtained 33,000 votes to Baluyot's 40,000. Though Abad Santos was defeated, eight of the twenty-one towns of Pampanga, including the provincial capital, elected Popular Front mayors. Popular Front candidates for mayor and councilor [sic] won in four towns in Tarlac and one town in Nueva Ecija. Guagua, Pampanga elected a Popular Front provincial board member.⁶⁰

Despite rising class tensions in 1940 and 1941, the PKP seems to have carried off the balancing act – satisfying both its constituencies. The outbreak of war, however, pushed the logic of the Comintern's line to the limits. The demands of the cross-class alliance were no longer just important – they became central. As Renato and Letizia Constantino put it in connection with the impact of the outbreak of World War Two in the Pacific on the class struggle in Luzon:

While it was not possible to define entirely the animosities between peasants and landlords, [PKP and PKP-influenced] leaders tried to contain escalating class demands in the interest of solidarity with the government which had also ranged itself with the world anti-fascist forces. Radical leaders also muted the anti-colonial aspect of their struggle since the United States now appeared as the bulwark of resistance to totalitarianism.⁶¹

Huk leader Luis Taruc, for example, denounced a raid by AMT members on the Pampanga Sugar Development Company, whose owners had fled, in late February 1942. "They were acting in a confused fashion without yet being aware of the bigger enemy, the Japanese."⁶² The Huk slogan was "Anti-Japanese Above All". "That meant exactly what it said," wrote Taruc. "We would

⁵⁹ Ibid, p 384.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p 388.

⁶¹ Renato Constantino and Letizia R. Constantino. *The Philippines: The Continuing Past*, Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1990, p 9.

⁶² Luis Taruc, *Born of the People*, Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1953, pp 42-43.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

forego an independent struggle for separate working class demands. To show our good faith we dissolved the AMT and KPMP, the peasant organisations. All Anti-Japanese Our Friends, All Pro-Japanese Our Enemies – that was our policy: For A Free And Democratic Philippines.”⁶³

The approach suffused the party's attitude to World War Two, with the PKP's Huk movement (Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon – Hukbalahap or People's Anti-Japanese Army) positioning itself not only as the most consistent fighter against Japanese occupation but simultaneously as a loyal defender of the interests of the colonial power, the United States. Partly to defend the international alliances of the Soviet Union, partly to continue to find favour with new middle-class recruits, it pledged loyalty to both the Philippine and the US governments before Manila had even fallen⁶⁴ and its Huk guerillas went as far as to raise the Filipino and US flags on capturing a town in Nueva Ecija.⁶⁵

The strategy was to prove disastrous. Although the party earned substantial prestige among the mass of the population, especially in Luzon, it was lulled into a sense of false security by its own propaganda and was caught badly off guard by US hostility at the end of the war.⁶⁶ (This will be discussed in “The return to arms”, below.) The experience would not be enough to make the party rethink: stageism had become part of the Filipino communist movement's intellectual baggage. As we will see later, the CPP in its turn has continued the strategy of holding back struggle from below to foster friendships above.

3) A nationalist vision of change

THE THIRD, and interlinked, legacy of Stalinism is the centrality of nationalism. The PKP was born into a world where the communist movement had rejected internationalism – as understood through the slogan “The main enemy is at home”⁶⁷ – in favour of a nominal framework of socialist advance within the boundaries of one state, and therefore in practice in favour of a degree of subordination to pro-capitalist forces.

⁶³ Ibid, pp 45-46.

⁶⁴ Kerkvliet, op cit, p 97.

⁶⁵ Constantinos, op cit, p 147.

⁶⁶ “We trusted the Americans...we thought of them as allies in a war against a fascist enemy.” Taruc, op cit, p 167.

⁶⁷ The slogan was advanced by the German revolutionary Karl Liebknecht during World War One. Paul Frolich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, London: Pluto, 1972, p 216.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

Implicit within the concept of "socialism in one country" is both a recognition and an acceptance of the legitimacy of the nation state, rather than the international class struggle, as the basic coin of political life. In the case of a colonial country like the Philippines this quickly came to mean that national liberation was the main battlecry of the Left. Socialism became a long-term goal, rather than the motive force of the immediate struggle.

The endemic pervasiveness of nationalism on the Philippine Left (and an unquestioning sympathy among outside commentators) means that the problems that flow from a nationalistic framework are rarely, if ever, remarked upon. (I will elaborate on this point in Chapter Three.) There is, therefore, little in the way of commentary on the PKP's increasingly patriotic orientation. A number of implications can be briefly sketched nonetheless.

The first is that it made it easier for the party to recruit among "patriots". But this gain was offset by the political weakness of both the PKP's and the CPP's cadres, a constant refrain among commentators from Allen to Sison. The second is, as we have seen above, that it blunted the class differentiation between peasant and landlord, employer and worker. It thus demobilising from time to time and place to place the struggle from below from which the party, like any other Left group, would depend for a fresh flow of recruits and inspiration.

The third is that the emphasis on the national question lubricated the party's shift from an overwhelming emphasis on the urban working class to the peasantry, who could be represented not only as a numerically important force, but the true embodiment of the Filipino spirit. An incident that throws rare light on the PKP's development on the question is cited by Saulo Jacinto Manahan, leader of the KPMP peasant federation, was one of those PKP cadres jailed in the early 1930s. He broke ranks with his comrades and accepted a pardon in 1935. Saulo comments:

He had earlier been at loggerheads with Evangelista over the question of whether the industrial proletariat in the Philippines – small in number but growing; or the peasantry should assume the leading role in the revolution. Manahan contended that the poor, traditionally revolutionary peasantry ... should constitute the main force ...

Another fundamental difference between the two communist leaders is that Manahan appeared to be more of a nationalist than an internationalist, hence clearly anticipating

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

the Titoist line of national communism. Evangelista, on the other hand, was a rabid pro-Comintern internationalist of the Leninist school.⁶⁸

Manahan was shunned by the PKP and his alternative peasant federation foundered. But it was not much more than a year later that Evangelista and comrades, under instruction from a pro-popular front Comintern, in turn accepted a pardon. PKP members were later to fight under the Philippine flag in a peasant war. Manahan, it appears, was in effect guilty only of jumping the ideological gun. The example gives a tantalising glimpse of the way in which cross-class alliances, reliance on stages, and nationalism were beginning to mesh to form a hegemonic Philippine Stalinist tradition. It was within this framework that the PKP became anti-government guerillas.

THE RETURN TO ARMS

ALL THE key components of PKP policy were strengthened by the experience of World War Two. During the war, the party had won substantial prestige, especially among the more radical peasants of Luzon, for its willingness to fight the Japanese occupiers. With the mainstream pro-US guerillas by and large avoiding firefights, the PKP-initiated Huk guerillas were virtually alone in engaging in battle. In 1200 engagements they accounted for around 25,000 enemy casualties, mostly among "puppet" troops and police.⁶⁹ But as subsequent developments suggest, the party did not intend to turn its guerilla resistance into a force to bring down either the US after reoccupation or the Filipino ruling class.

The circumstantial evidence is strong. The PKP played a critical role in forming, in July 1945, the Democratic Alliance (DA).⁷⁰ The new grouping stood for relief for victims of war, including "legitimate guerrillas", the replacement of collaborators with anti-Japanese representatives, a fair share for workers and peasants in a revitalised economy, civil liberties and independence.⁷¹ As Luis Taruc put it, the DA was not revolutionary:

It believed in the ballot and the peaceful petition as the instruments through which the people's will should be expressed and achieved. It did not propose even the mildest

⁶⁸ Saulo, *op cit*, p 25.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p 34.

⁷⁰ Like the pre-war Popular Front, the DA included a wide range of groupings from the middle class as well as from the union and peasant movement. See Kerkvliet, *op cit*, pp 140-141, and the Constantinos, *op cit*, p 184.

⁷¹ Kerkvliet, *op cit*, p 140.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

socialization or change in the system of society as we knew it. The path it proposed would have led no further than the development of a healthy industrialized capitalist country out of the feudal agricultural colonial condition that we had.⁷²

In other words, the DA was the logical continuation of the popular frontist approach of the pre-war years. It paid off immediately. In the national elections held in April 1946, no fewer than six Democratic Alliance candidates were elected to Congress from Luzon.⁷³ They included PKP leaders Jesus Lava and Taruc. The result turned out to be the high-water mark for Philippine communism's electoral ambitions.

There seems little question that, if the PKP had been allowed to enjoy the modest fruits of success, it would have continued to play the role of the radical but essentially reformist fringe of the Philippine polity.⁷⁴ But it was not to be. Former Huks had already faced repression at the hands of the US military reoccupiers and the administration of newly elected Nacionalista Party candidate, President Manuel Roxas. Now Roxas blocked the successful DA candidates from taking their seats to prevent them voting against the constitutional changes needed to ensure continuing "free trade" between the newly independent Philippines and the US, on US terms.⁷⁵

Roxas did not leave it there, his administration launching a series of provocations over the right of former Huks to bear arms – provocations that were continued after Roxas's death in early 1948 by President Elpidio Quirino. Meanwhile the radicalised and organised peasants of central Luzon were also facing repression at the hands of the government. It was concerned to re-establish the prerogatives of landlords who had fled their estates during the war. It was that repression that generated the new Huk rebellion.⁷⁶ As one villager put it, the government crackdown was "like rice cooking in a pot – it first got hot, then began to boil, and then it bubbled over".⁷⁷

⁷² Quoted in *ibid*, p 140.

⁷³ The Constantinos record a seventh successful DA candidate, presumably from another region, *op cit*, p 203. Jose Maria Sison reports eight in "Land Reform and National Democracy", *On National Democracy*. Quezon City: Aklatang Gising Na, no date, p 28.

⁷⁴ A number of writers during the Cold War period put a different interpretation, however – that the PKP's turn to armed struggle was part of a general trend in Asia co-ordinated by the Cominform (established by Moscow in 1947 to carry its policies into other communist parties as a successor to the Comintern). See, for example, Colin Mason, *Dragon Army: The Pattern of Communist Expansion Through Asia*, Sydney: Horwitz Publications, 1965, p 57, and Geoffrey Fairbairn, *Revolutionary Warfare and Communist Strategy: The Threat to South-East Asia*, London: Faber and Faber, 1968, pp 90-91.

⁷⁵ Constantinos, *op cit*, pp 198-204.

⁷⁶ The name Huk in this context was an abbreviation of Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan (HMB), or National Liberation Army.

⁷⁷ Kerkvliet, *op cit*, p 143.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

This is not the place for a detailed consideration of the Huk rebellion. The point that is relevant to this thesis, however, is that the PKP's underlying politics saw it vacillate several times between respectability and armed struggle over a short period. As Geoffrey Fairbairn notes:

After the war, the Filipino Communists found their way barred as far as the "parliamentary form of struggle" was concerned; but as was shown earlier the Communist party used guerrilla warfare as only one arm of its strategy. This pattern is invariable. Its significance is being stressed simply because Communist revolutionary warfare cannot be separated from the political "guerrilla" approach of Communist parties to every concrete situation. Revolutionary guerrilla warfare is resorted to when it seems to be the most viable form of struggle or the only available form of struggle at a given time.⁷⁸

So in June 1946, a number of leading members, including Taruc, were part of establishing co-ordination among the newly remobilised guerillas groups,⁷⁹ but even they adopted a defensive strategy: "Avoid encounters and fight only when cornered and attacked."⁸⁰ Moreover, Taruc continued to co-operate with the government's "pacification campaign" until the murder in August of fellow party leader Juan Feleo, almost certainly at the hands of military police.⁸¹ Such was his reluctance to fight that he gladly accepted an (ultimately abortive) amnesty offer from President Quirino in 1948.

Meanwhile, the overall party leadership was still desperate to find a peaceful outcome that would leave the way open for the building of an urban-based party that could intervene in the parliamentary arena.

From the safer precincts of Manila, the PKP leadership cautioned the new Huks ... to avoid armed struggle, surrender their weapons if necessary, and wage only peaceful, or "parliamentary" struggle. The bewildered Huks responded that they had been attacked first and were essentially defending themselves. The party refused to budge ... Since the party apparatus was then a mere paper structure, its involvement in the Luzon conflict probably would have made little difference. But its position firmly on the sidelines in the

⁷⁸ Fairbairn, *op cit*, p 126.

⁷⁹ Kerkvliet, *op cit*, p 169.

⁸⁰ Constantinos, *op cit*, p 208.

⁸¹ Agoncillo, *op cit*, p 452.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

opening stages illustrates the shallowness of charges that the Huk rebellion was from the start a Moscow-directed communist plot ...⁸²

The party had come to believe its own propaganda about the "progressive" nature of the US and its ability to use the democratic space afforded by the country's independence. It was caught off guard, unable to advise its members and supporters to do any more than avoid provocation. Its eventual grudging acceptance of armed rebellion in 1948 represented a pragmatic and undertheorised adaption to spontaneous but localised peasant insurgency. An indication of the party's confusion over the interplay of legal and armed struggle was the way that, in the four previous years, the leadership had changed hands several times.⁸³

It took Feleo's murder, a government offensive, the banning in 1948 of the Huks and the PKP-dominated Pambansang Kaisahan ng mga Magbubikid (National Peasants Union or PKM), and the defeat in the largely fraudulent 1949 election of the nationalist ticket led by Claro Mayo Recto before the party was prepared fully to embrace armed struggle.

In an atmosphere by now coloured by the Cold War, the party leadership dominated by Jose Lava declared in 1950 that the Philippines was in a "revolutionary situation" and devised a two-year timetable for seizing power. The Huk rebellion had been transformed in the eyes of the party from a defensive response to government harassment to the beginning of an insurrection. The core politics, however, prevailed. In line with the stageist conception of revolution, the aim of the revolt was to introduce a national democratic government, presiding over a mixed economy.⁸⁴

The arrest on October 18, 1950, of the main elements of the PKP Politburo, including Jose Lava, put paid to any hope of victory, tenuous as that might in any case have been. With the election to the presidency of the populist Ramon Magsaysay in 1953, many of the Huks' supporters felt that change through legal means was once again becoming possible. Taruc surrendered in May 1954 and the rebellion effectively petered out. Jesus Lava, now party leader, was finally captured in 1964.

From then on, although small numbers stayed in the field under arms (enabling the New People's Army to claim a degree of continuity and therefore legitimacy), the main concern of the

⁸² Chapman, *op cit*, pp 62-63.

⁸³ Saulo, pp 42-43.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

diminishing forces of the PKP was to resume life in the electoral and legal arena, an aim it achieved, as noted above, in 1974. The wheel had turned full circle.

The CPP seemed to be the antithesis of this retreat into legality. The party's main criticism of the PKP was its reluctance to prosecute guerilla war and its ineptness at doing so. Meanwhile, however, the PKP's core politics of nationalism, stageism, and class collaboration were transmitted across the political generations without great comment. Indeed, the Chinese victory of 1949, which had been based on just such politics, reinforced their hold on the CPP. (See Chapter Two, "The China Heritage".)

The new Communist Party was to take up the gun with greater enthusiasm and commitment, but it in turn would have to deal with the quandaries its parent party had faced.

CONCLUSION

SISON'S CPP heaped scorn on the PKP leadership's retreat. As noted above, the approach to armed struggle drove a wedge of enormous bitterness between the two parties. But the lesson Sison and his comrades drew was not that the fundamental politics of the PKP were flawed, but that it had failed to prepare sufficiently for insurgency and had seriously underestimated the timescale of any successful guerilla struggle.

The underlying assumptions that legitimised a strategy of armed struggle, as opposed to a working-class-based strategy of urban insurrection, went unchallenged. The PKP's platform of the 1940s bears an uncanny resemblance to the CPP's policy statements of today. Both organisations regard the Philippines as a semicolonial country and the struggle for "genuine" national independence as paramount. Both relegate the struggle for socialism to the distant future. Both lean on popular fronts between the working class, the intelligentsia, sections of the bourgeoisie, and the petit bourgeoisie (above all, the peasantry).⁸⁵

The CPP, like the PKP before it, has been prepared to engage in a process of negotiated settlement to its insurgency. Albeit more diffidently, it too has entered the parliamentary arena.

⁸⁴ Kerkvliet, op cit, p 219.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Saulo, op cit, p 151, and Guerrero, op cit, p 162. Sison, far from criticising the Popular Front, takes the PKP to task for not being willing *enough* in making alliances with sections of the bourgeoisie. See "National Democracy and Socialism", *On National Democracy*, op cit, pp 47-48.

CHAPTER ONE: THE COMMUNIST PARTIES' COMMON HERITAGE

This cautious engagement with the mainstream will be explored below, particularly in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, but for now the CPP's positions serve to indicate that despite more than 30 years of armed struggle, these aspects of party life can sometimes be – as they were for the PKP – tactical, not dogmatic, questions.

It is my contention, then, that the two communist parties share core politics – nationalism, a notion of the national democratic “stage” preceding any transition to socialism and, underpinning both ideas, the concept of the popular front, with its necessary emphasis on the peasantry and the partial suppression of class struggle by the party to maintain alliances with sympathetic upper-class figures. The continuities carry greater weight than the discontinuities.

On surface appearances, this seems an odd statement to make. The PKP was created by trade union leaders who instinctively looked to the urban working class as the key for change, at least in the party's earliest years, but who then turned to parliamentarianism as their party was Stalinised. The CPP was created by intellectuals and students influenced by the success of the victory of the Chinese Communist Party under Mao Zedong in 1949, who drew the lesson that armed struggle conducted among and by the peasantry was the way to success.

But as I shall argue in greater detail below, armed struggle and parliamentarianism are both aspects of elitist political practice – and therefore the CPP's program does not represent a fundamental break from the PKP's, nor from the Stalinist tradition overall.

In the next chapter I proceed to put one of the CPP's key ideas derived from that tradition – that of the semi-feudal nature of Philippine society – to the test, and draw out some implications for the Left's struggle.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

INTRODUCTION

AT THE heart of the CPP's strategy and tactics lies an analysis of Philippine political economy that regards the country as essentially semifeudal: impacted by, but not yet integrated into, capitalist relations. Such an analysis clearly has important implications, underpinning the party's position that the fight for socialist revolution can take place only in the distant, capitalist, future. It gives pride of place to a rural struggle based on the numerical strength of the peasantry and reduces the working class to a subsidiary role in events.¹ Given the centrality of the semifeudal theory, any critique of the CPP must begin by addressing and interrogating it. This is the purpose of this chapter.

For Sison, this concept of the Philippines as a semifeudal and semicolonial country has, as will be explained below, stood the test of time. It was sufficient basis for the launch of the CPP in 1968; it continues to be in his opinion an empirically accurate and therefore politically compelling analysis in the Philippines at the turn of the century. Given Sison's intellectual hegemony in the CPP this is of no mean significance. Much of this present work necessarily consists of a critical examination of Sison's writings and comments. Known by party members and non-members alike as Joma, he has dominated, effectively single-handedly, the theoretical development of the party. Although friends and critics alike acknowledge the party's success in building layer upon layer of operational leaders, Sison is pre-eminent in the field of ideas.

¹ James Putzel identifies three implications flowing from the semifeudal and semicolonial analysis: nationalism, the importance of economic development and the central role of the peasantry. "Managing the 'Main Force': The Communist Party and the Peasantry in the Philippines", *Kasarinlan* 11, no. 3-4, 1996, p 137.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

In this chapter I begin by outlining how Sison, and by implication the party, came to adopt the semifeudal, semicolonial position. I then proceed to explain the implications of the semifeudalism position (the question of semicolonialism being left to Chapter Three) before challenging it both theoretically and empirically. Such a challenge involves reference to the considerable debate and literature on the mode of production in the Philippines.² It is beyond the scope of this current work to deal comprehensively with this question – my intentions are more limited. Nonetheless, I shall question the usefulness of the term “feudalism” in the Philippine context and argue why I agree with those such as Jonathan Fast, Jim Richardson, Sonny Melencio, Rene E. Ofreneo, Renato Constantino senior, Ben Reid, and the contributors to *Feudalism and Capitalism in the Philippines* among others who say that it is reasonable and legitimate to talk of the Philippines today as within the circuit of capitalist exchange and accumulation.³

I make no attempt to prove the universal domination of the capitalist mode of production in the Philippines. (Sison, of course, does not deny that elements of capitalist relationships exist in the Philippines, but insists that they are stunted and distorted by feudalism.⁴) For the purposes of my argument, it should be sufficient to demonstrate that, notwithstanding any evidence of continuing pre-capitalist forms of production, the central dynamic of the Philippine political economy is capitalist, and indeed has been so in some sectors like sugar production since as early as the eighteenth century.⁵

The second element of my argument against the concept of semifeudalism is that the resultant dichotomy drawn by Sison between the “national bourgeoisie” and the “comprador bourgeoisie”⁶

² For summaries of this debate, see, for instance, Mark M. Turner, “The Political Economy of the Philippines: Critical Perspectives”, in *Pacific Affairs* 57, no. 3, 1984, and Virgilio Rojas, “The Mode of Production Controversy in the Philippines: Anatomy of a Lingering Theoretical Stalemate”, in *Debate* 4, September 1992.

³ Jonathan Fast and Jim Richardson, *Roots of Dependency: Political and Economic Revolution in 19th Century Philippines*, Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1987; Sonny Melencio, “Leninism versus Maoism: The ‘Semifeudalist’ Debate in the Philippines”, *Links* 3, 1994, pp 75-87 (plus four pages of erratum); Rene E. Ofreneo, *Capitalism in Philippine Agriculture*, Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, updated edition, 1987; interview with author, Quezon City, June 25, 1991; Ben Reid, *Philippine Left: Political Crisis and Social Change*, Manila: Journal of Contemporary Asia Publishers, 2000; Temario C. Rivera, Merlin M. Magallona, Rigoberto D. Tiglao, Ernesto M. Valencia, Alex R. Magno and Renato Constantino, *Symposium: Feudalism and Capitalism in the Philippines: Trends and Implications*, Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1982.

⁴ Interview with author, Utrecht, July 8, 1993.

⁵ By pre-capitalist, I am referring to production for use values, i.e., of food and goods produced to be consumed by the producers themselves or by their immediate exploiters, rather than to be placed on the market.

⁶ For Sison, the national bourgeoisie is that section of the capitalist class that has an objective interest in genuine national liberation, since it would allow it to develop its business behind the shelter of an import

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

is misplaced and misleading. I intend to establish that there are numerous business and personal ties between the big landlords, those business people who serve foreign capital, and Filipino industrialists and employers.

The relevance of this analytical emphasis on what unites rather than divides the Philippine ruling class is that it challenges the CPP's strategic orientation towards uniting with the "national bourgeoisie", even if such unity were to come at the cost of holding back working class struggle. The importance of this point will be discussed in Chapter Four (in connection with national democratic trade union organisation) and Chapter Seven (in connection with coalition and electoral work).

THE CHINA HERITAGE

THE INTELLECTUAL inspiration for Sison's party came from Mao Zedong⁷ and the success of the 1949 Chinese revolution, as noted in Chapter One. In an interview with William Chapman published in 1987, Sison commented:

I was already a Marxist when I first read Mao. Then and now I consider him the greatest thinker on colonialism and imperialism and feudalism ... And he was unbeatable on the subject of a people's war. And then by 1964, the line between the USSR and Mao was very clear. Krushchev to me meant cooperation with imperialism and China was the leader against him. China was a big force and was encouraging revolution of all colonial countries. China looked to me like the Philippines of today.⁸

The CPP by then no longer had a slavishly pro-China line, having stayed loyal to Mao rather than to his successors. But the general analysis that Sison inherited from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) still provides the underpinning for its theory and practice today. Indeed, those on the Philippine Left who wish to distance themselves from the party today refer disparagingly to

substitutionalist strategy of industrialisation. By comprador, he is referring to those capitalists whose interests are bound up with serving as the local agents of multinational businesses. See, for example, Jose Maria Sison and Rainer Werning, *The Philippine Revolution: The Leader's View*, New York: Crane Russak, 1989, pp 53-54.

⁷ Mao Zedong is the modern spelling. In some references, the name will appear as Mao Tse-tung.

⁸ William Chapman, *Inside the Philippine Revolution: The New People's Army and Its Struggle for Power*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1987, p 75.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

“Chinese ideas”.⁹ The CCP argued that China was a semicolonial and semifeudal country, with a tiny working class and a massive peasantry, in which the primary task was to complete the tasks of the bourgeois revolution – national unity and independence. Only on the basis of the establishment of China as an independent centre of capital accumulation could the stage be set for the growth of the working class and the eventual struggle for socialism. Mao, writing in Yanan in 1939, was quite explicit about this.

Imperialism and the feudal landlord class being the chief enemies of the Chinese revolution at this stage, what are the present tasks of the revolution? Unquestionably, the main tasks are to strike at these two enemies, to carry out a national revolution to overthrow foreign imperialist oppression and a democratic revolution to overthrow feudal landlord oppression.¹⁰

He continued:

What, indeed, is the character of the Chinese revolution at the present stage? Is it bourgeois-democratic or a proletarian-socialist revolution? Obviously, it is not the latter but the former ... the new type of democratic revolution clears the way for capitalism on the one hand and creates the prerequisites for socialism on the other.¹¹

Sison adopted these formulations intact. Where Mao led, talking about the national and democratic revolutions being linked because imperialism was the main support of the feudal landlord class,¹² Sison followed, arguing that US imperialism was the main support for the Filipino landlord class, and vice versa.¹³ Where Mao posited that the national democratic revolution would be of a “new type” – because unlike classic bourgeois revolutions undertaken in opposition to feudalism, those in the twentieth century were confronted by imperialism¹⁴ – Sison agreed.¹⁵

In his seminal *Philippine Society and Revolution*, published in 1970, Sison defined semifeudalism thus:

⁹ The approach is used, for example, by Renato Constantino senior in his interview with the author, op cit.

¹⁰ Mao Tse-tung, *The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party: Carry the Revolution Through to the End*, Anglo-Chinese Educational Series, London, no date, p 20.

¹¹ Ibid, pp 32-33.

¹² Ibid, p 20.

¹³ Amado Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution, Specific Characteristics of Our People's War, and Our Urgent Task[s]*, Oakland: International Association of Filipino Patriots, 1979, p 64.

¹⁴ Mao, op cit, p 32.

¹⁵ Guerrero, op cit, p 130.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

The semifeudal character of Philippine society is principally determined by the impingement of US monopoly capitalism on the old feudal mode of production and the subordination of the latter to the former. The concrete result of the intertwining of foreign monopoly capitalism and domestic feudalism is the erosion and dissolution of a natural economy of self-sufficiency in favor of a commodity economy. Feudalism has been encouraged and retained by US imperialism to perpetuate the poverty of the broad masses of the people, subjugate the most numerous class which is the peasantry and manipulate local backwardness for the purpose of having cheap labor and cheap raw materials from the country.¹⁶

Nearly two decades on, Sison's position had scarcely changed. Speaking in Quezon City on April 9, 1986, he argued that Spain developed feudalism in the Philippines over 300 years, and that feudalism was retained by the American colonialists. He added that although the Philippines was dominated by a system of commodities, the fact that the country was primarily an exporter of agricultural goods and reprocessed light goods meant the use of the term capitalism was misleading.¹⁷ Just a few days later, he opened a lecture on "Crisis of the Semifeudal Economy" by arguing:

US monopoly capitalism has impacted on the Philippine economy to shape it into a semifeudal one, and put it firmly within the orbit of the world capitalist system. The commodity system has prevailed over the natural economy of self-sufficiency. But domestic feudalism has merely subordinated itself to an external industrial power.¹⁸

A feudal system based on commodity circulation and within the orbit of the world capitalist system? If this appeared somewhat confusing, it was not, even according to Sison, surprising.

Actually "semifeudalism" is a gray term – there is the element of departing from strict feudalism, but there's still the connection. There's still a rope, so to speak, connecting these apparently bourgeois phenomena – the use, for example, of imported or modern inputs – to the more fundamental fact of feudalism. Feudalism is anchored on the private

¹⁶ Ibid, p 64.

¹⁷ Jose Maria Sison, "Semifeudalism in the Philippines: Myth or Reality?", *Prospects of Agrarian Reform under the New Order*, Romulo A. Sandoval, ed., Quezon City: Urban Rural Mission-National Council of Churches in the Philippines and Rural Enlightenment and Accretion in Philippine Society, 1986, pp 59-62.

¹⁸ Jose Maria Sison, "Crisis of the Semifeudal Economy", *Philippine Crisis and Revolution*, roneoed, no publication details.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

ownership of land by the exploiting class, the landlord class. That is the most basic element to start with.¹⁹

In the 1989 book *The Philippine Revolution: The Leader's View*, he stands by semifeudalism as a term that describes the reality of Philippine society.

... As an economic term, semifeudal refers to an economy whose internal forces of production are mainly and essentially agrarian and preindustrial and whose relations of production are dominated by the combination of the comprador big bourgeoisie in the cities and the landlord class in the countryside.²⁰

What would change the Philippines from semifeudalism? "Basic industries. Basic industries and land reform to break up the power and the wealth of the landlords. Those are the two things – national industrialisation and genuine and thorough-going land reform."²¹

While elements of the CPP's thinking and strategy have undergone change, the central analysis has – in the party's eyes – stood the test of time. Clearly, such positions have important consequences for party activity, tactics and strategy.

1) Workers forced to the fringe

THE FIRST of these consequences touches on the role of the working class. This will be dealt with only briefly here, for I have already outlined in Chapter One the circumstances in which the classical Marxist concept of working-class revolution suffered a political defeat at the hands of Stalinism, and Chapter Four will contrast the Stalinist and classical Marxist attitudes to the leading role of the working class.

Suffice it to say that the analysis of semifeudalism reinforces politically the fact that the Filipino urban working class is a minority of the total population. So in analysing workforce figures in 1986, Sison lumped agricultural workers in with peasants to claim that "there are four peasants [sic] for every industrial worker". He went on to marginalise industrial workers even further:

¹⁹ Sison, "Semifeudalism in the Philippines: Myth or Reality?", op cit, p 67.

²⁰ Sison and Werning, op cit, p 22.

²¹ Interview with author, op cit.

Only 74% of industrial workers are in manufacturing; and in turn 70% of workers in manufacturing are employed in small fabricating and repair shops, each employing less than ten workers and therefore hardly qualifying as truly manufacturing enterprises.²²

An argument that marginalises capitalist relations further marginalises the working class as a force, reducing it to largely symbolic value. What is more, the identification of the failed first communist party, the PKP, with an urban working class/parliamentary approach has also made it easier for the CPP leadership to belittle the prioritisation of work among the urban masses.

2) A call to arms

THE SECOND consequence is the emphasis on armed struggle and the pivotal role of the peasantry. For, so the argument goes, if the capitalist section of the economy is small, dependent and weak, the working class must be equally marginal as a force for change. Hence Sison's formulation that while the working class may be the leading class in the Philippine revolution, it is the peasantry that is the main force.²³ Such a position is, like so many of Sison's basic theoretical premises, drawn from Mao, who argued that the Chinese proletariat, while being the class with the highest political consciousness and sense of organization, could not win without allies.²⁴

In itself, of course, this is true. The Bolshevik-led Russian workers' revolution of October 1917 would not have survived more than a few weeks or months without support from the peasantry. But there is a difference between Lenin's and Mao's approach to class alliances. Lenin argued that if the working class led, it could inspire the peasantry and sections of the urban middle class to follow. This would be an alliance in which one class, the workers, would call the shots. By contrast, for Mao "alliance" in practice describes the process of mainly student cadres drawn from the cities leading peasant foot soldiers in guerilla war.

This is to all intents and purposes also the position of the CPP. The leading role of the working class, as will be discussed in Chapter Four, is reduced to a merely symbolic value, or is expressed in

²² Sison, "Crisis of the Semifeudal Economy", op cit, p 2.

²³ Guerrero, op cit, pp 157-58.

²⁴ See, for example, pp 236-264 in Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-Tung*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

the role played by individual workers leaving the cities to join the NPA. The semifeudal theory inevitably places the party's emphasis on the numerical strength of the rural masses, whose interests in turn become the main interests of the party, and whose sons and daughters comprise the bulk of the guerilla forces. As Sison wrote in 1989, using phraseology his supporters would have recognised from 20 years previously:

The working class is the most progressive productive and political force in the Philippines ... Being a minority class in Philippine society, the working class can muster a bigger force by forming a basic alliance with the peasantry ... But how is the basic alliance realized? It is by deploying and developing CPP cadres and members in the countryside to build the New People's Army ...²⁵

The semifeudal analysis is therefore a central component of the CPP's thought and a key guide to action. The question therefore arises whether the analysis is correct. I shall now examine a range of criticisms of the party's position.

PRODUCTION – A DEBATE A LA MODE

THE DEBATE on the mode of production in the Philippines is central not only to understanding the nature of Filipino society but to deciding tactics and strategy for the various strands of the Left. It is an important element of the intellectual ground on which the CPP, its breakaway rivals and the social democratic groups battle for legitimacy.

The ferocity which characterises the debate is fueled by the fact that many on the Philippine left believe that the issue directly relates to revolutionary strategy and tactics.²⁶

In the same way, as noted above, that the analysis of semifeudalism underpins the party's strategy and practice, the argument that the Philippines is substantially more integrated into the capitalist world economy than the CPP would allow lends support to the new, breakaway formations' focus on urban struggle and the non-revolutionary Left's orientation to legal and parliamentary politics.

²⁵ Sison and Werning, op cit, p 52.

²⁶ Melencio, op cit, p 76.

There is a third, alternative, interpretation of the situation which flows from the classical Marxist heritage – that the integration of the Philippines into the global circuit of trade and capital accumulation lays the basis for a different kind of revolutionary possibility, one based on the leading role of the urban working class and which sees a Philippine socialist revolution as viable if it spreads beyond its national borders. Dealing with such an argument falls beyond the scope of this thesis and so, in this section, I shall be concerned mostly to challenge the semifeudal theory of the CPP, with conclusions being argued out more fully below.

Before the Spanish conquered the archipelago in the sixteenth century, the bulk of the population lived an essentially subsistence existence in small, self-sufficient communities with the land held in common. Nonetheless, as Renato Constantino senior has noted, elements of the pre-Spanish Philippine economy (insofar as one can use the term about a series of isolated and scattered communities, divided by geography, language and culture) were, under the impact of Islamic expansionism, already beginning to take the first, elementary steps towards class differentiation.²⁷ Movable property, which Marx described as the solvent corroding the equality of pre-class society, was beginning to appear as a feature of life in a number of pockets of settlement.²⁸ But such developments were a far cry from the much more obviously exploitative way of life enforced by the colonialists on the bulk of the population.

It is not disputed that the Philippines entered the world economy, in a partial and limited fashion, from early on in the colonial period. The Spanish officially opened Manila as a free port in 1834,²⁹ relinquishing their former monopoly on the China-Manila-Americas trade route. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the linkages to world capitalism were already, in Constantino's words, "a compelling reality".³⁰ Further developments deepened the experience. The hacienda system, which matured rapidly in the later decades of the nineteenth century, brought capitalist agricultural methods and production for the world market into the heart of the

²⁷ Renato Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*, with Letizia R. Constantino, Manila: No publisher, 1989, pp 36-39. William Henry Scott argues that there was an enormous variety of class (and classless) structures in the pre-colonial Philippines; "Class Structure in the Unhispanized Philippines" in *Cracks in the Parchment Curtain: And Other Essays in Philippine History*, Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1985, p 128.

²⁸ David Glanz, "Marx and the Communal Village", *Socialist Review* (Melbourne) 3, 1990, for more on this general question.

²⁹ In practice, the port had been open for some decades before 1834. See Fast and Richardson, op cit, pp 6-7.

³⁰ Constantino, op cit, p 59.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

Philippine rural economy.³¹ In the same period, capitalist manufacturing began to expand rapidly, above all in Manila.

The economy was in its mercantile capitalist stages but there were already quite large concentrations of workers in some factories and in the stevedoring companies ... [T]he government set up five [tobacco] factories in Manila. Starting with a few hundred workers these factories were employing a total of around twenty thousand workers during the years from 1850 to 1882. Factory operations featured an assembly line with well-defined division of labor.³²

Despite the weaknesses of the Philippine economy, what was true in 1882 is even more the case today. In Metro Manila and elsewhere there is an industrial working class numbering millions. Industrial waged workers comprise some 15 per cent of the workforce,³³ along with a substantial number of service workers and agricultural workers (the importance of whom will be elaborated below).

What is contested is first the extent of capitalist penetration into the economy and the extent to which feudal relations can be said to continue to exist, and second the relationship between the Philippine capitalist sector and the world economy and therefore the nature and role of the Philippine ruling class. Sison's position, as noted above, is that imperialism has wrecked the former feudal relations while limiting the opportunities for capitalist development.

The extent and quality of US monopoly capital injected into the Philippine economy since the beginning of the 20th century have merely caused the subordination of domestic feudalism to US imperialism. It is in the nature of US imperialism to cause uneven and spasmodic development, to maintain a few cities ruled by the comprador class and preserve a vast countryside ruled by the landlord class.

Feudalism still persists in the Philippines although US imperialism has introduced a certain degree of capitalist development. US monopoly capital has assimilated the seed of

³¹ See Ofreneo, *op cit*, pp 6-9; Constantino, *op cit*, pp 128-131.

³² *Ibid*, pp 161-162.

³³ World Bank figures for 1990, quoted in Colin Sparks, "The Eye of the Storm", *International Socialism* 78, 1998, p 11.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

capitalism that is within the womb of domestic feudalism but at the same time it has prevented the full growth of this seed into a national capitalism.³⁴

The strength of this analysis can be measured, according to Sison, in the immiseration of the peasantry and landless labourers, the growth of sharecropping as opposed to leasehold farming, the political power of the landlord class, and the stunted domestic market for Philippine products. Semifeudalism also explains, continuing Sison's argument, the peculiar development of the Philippine ruling class, which is made up of the rural big landlords, the compradors (those who make profits acting as middlemen for overseas concerns) and the bureaucrat capitalists (who service the other fractions of the ruling class through their control of the state machine, enriching themselves along the way).³⁵

Elements of this argument, including the appalling level of rural poverty, the power of the big landlords, the corruption endemic in the state machine, and so on, are incontrovertible. But that does not in and of itself prove (or disprove) Sison's point. We need to examine in more detail the two main points in contention, first the nature of the economy and, later, the nature of the ruling class.

MODELLING THE ECONOMY

1) A fief in the night?

TO WHAT extent does the term "feudalism" allow us to understand the dynamic of Philippine political economy? For most writers on the question, the starting point of the debate is the extent to which feudal relations still hold – thereby, implicitly or explicitly, accepting that feudalism once operated within at least part of the archipelago. So, for example, Rene Ofreneo, a supporter of the neo-industrialisation school which argues that the Philippines is essentially capitalist, wrote in 1987 about European colonisation:

The main mechanism used by the Spaniards for the collection of tribute was the *encomienda* system which was akin to state feudalism in medieval Europe. The native population was apportioned into *encomiendas* which were large territorial jurisdictions

³⁴ Guerrero, op cit, p 89.

³⁵ Ibid, p 116.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

presided over by Spanish *encomenderos* ... The *encomendero* assumed the responsibility of protecting the natives and providing them with basic religious instruction. In turn, the natives were supposed to till the soil of the *encomienda* and share part of their crops with the *encomendero*.³⁶

Such a description has much in common with Maurice Dobb's classic Marxist definition of feudalism:

... an obligation laid on the producer by force and independently of his own volition to fulfil certain economic demands of an overlord, whether these demands take the form of services to be performed or of dues to be paid in money or in kind ...³⁷

There are, however, difficulties with leaving the comparison there. Feudalism was not simply a vicious method of extracting surplus from an agricultural population. Its specific form carried within it certain dynamic contradictions that meant it was capable of generating small commodity production and laying the basis of agricultural and handicraft capitalism. Of particular importance was the transition to money rents that allowed tenants who engaged in improvements to place products on the market and begin the process of private accumulation.³⁸ This underlines the importance of what Dobb went on to point out, that the difference between feudalism and slavery (or capitalism) was that the direct producer maintained possession of the means of production and carried out production independently: hence the process of extraction of the surplus had to be carried out by extra-economic force.³⁹

It is far from clear that this relationship applied to those working on the *encomiendas*. David Barrows argues that the *encomienda* system "was based to a certain extent on the feudal system, still surviving in the Peninsula at the time of her colonial conquests" but emphasises that the *encomendero* had been granted the right to collect tribute from a given number of natives, rather than an area of land as such.⁴⁰ Rather than feudalism, Martin Noone prefers the parallel with the

³⁶ Ofreneo, op cit, p 4.

³⁷ Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, London: Routledge, 1967, p 35.

³⁸ For this debate see Georges Lefebvre et al, *The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism*, London: Verso, 1987; T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin, eds., *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988; Chris Harman, "From Feudalism to Capitalism", *International Socialism* 45, 1989.

³⁹ Dobb, op cit, p 36.

⁴⁰ David P. Barrows, *History of the Philippines*, New York: World Book Company, 1925, p87. The point is also made by Nicholas P. Cushner, SJ, in *Spain in the Philippines: From Conquest to Revolution*, with Charles E. Tuttle, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 1971, pp 107-113.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

ecclesiastical benefice.⁴¹ Drawing on the experience in the Spanish colonies in the Americas, Barrows argues:

Yet the granting of subjects without the land on which they lived made possible their transfer and sale from one *encomendero* to another, and in this way thousands of Indians of America were made practically slaves, and were forced to labor in the mines.⁴²

Although their actions were in breach of the legal niceties of the *encomienda* system, the early Spanish colonialists in the Philippines behaved in much the same way. Labour requisition for non-agricultural purposes such as shipbuilding was widespread.⁴³ Many Filipinos were forced to work in mines, even at the expense of the planting of crops.⁴⁴ Unlike the feudal lords of Europe, who had a material interest in the survival from generation to generation of their serfs, the *encomenderos* behaved like short-term plunderers – which is exactly what they were, as their rights were usually granted for only a couple of generations with the privilege of gathering tribute eventually returning to the crown. To quote President Ferdinand Marcos, who had a certain latterday expertise in such matters:

At the close of the first century [of Spanish rule], the *encomienda* was thus nothing more than the legal framework of a scheme which allowed retired military personnel and their widows to collect at the taxable source their pensions and deserving religious and charitable institutions, their grants-in-aid from the state.⁴⁵

Was this feudalism? Not according to a number of writers, including Fegan and McLennan. Fegan argues that “there was no prior feudal stage here [in the Philippines], but that the colonial period is marked by ‘rent capitalist’ relations of extraction of surplus product”. McLennan also agrees with the rent capitalist analysis, and both writers criticise the label “feudalism” in the Philippine setting as parochial and Eurocentric.⁴⁶

If the word feudalism is meant to describe rural poverty, grossly unequal power relations and general backwardness among the bulk of the population, it applies – but at the cost of sacrificing

⁴¹ Martin J. Noone, SSC, *General History of the Philippines: Part I, Vol I, The Discovery and Conquest of the Philippines (1521-1581)*, Manila: Historical Conservation Society, 1986, pp 400-401.

⁴² Barrows, op cit, p 87.

⁴³ Cushner, op cit, pp 114-117.

⁴⁴ Barrows, op cit, pp 136-138

⁴⁵ Ferdinand E. Marcos, *The History of the Filipino People*, Manila: Tadhana, 1977, p 202.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Rojas, op cit, p 19.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

any precise, terminological usefulness. If the word is meant to refer back to the mode of production dominant in western Europe between the tenth and fourteenth centuries, then it fails to describe the concrete reality of Spanish colonial rule. In any case, the amount of land brought under the *encomienda* system was small, and all significant areas of production were brought into the realm of the world market in relatively short order.

2) Everything for the bottom line

THE ACCELERATING impact of the world market raises a further problem with the orthodox readings of Spanish colonialism. If, as is widely accepted, agricultural production in at least parts of the archipelago was brought under the whip of the world market from early on, then this itself is evidence that while relations on the land may not have been themselves directly capitalist in form, the framework in which they operated was decisively so. As Karl Marx wrote in relation to the slave economy of the southern United States, the discipline of competing as part of the wider world economy forced slaveowners to consider their operations as if they were conventional capitalists.

But as soon as people, whose production still moves within the lower forms of slave-labour, corvée-labour, etc., are drawn into the whirlpool of an international market dominated by the capitalistic mode of production, the sale of their products for export becoming their principal interest, the civilised horrors of over-work are grafted on the barbaric horrors of slavery, serfdom, etc. Hence the negro labour in the Southern States of the American Union preserved something of a patriarchal character, so long as production was chiefly directed to immediate local consumption.

But in proportion, as the export of cotton became of vital interest to these states, the over-working of the negro and sometimes the using up of his life in seven years of labour became a factor in a calculated and calculating system. It was no longer a question of obtaining from him a certain quantity of useful products. It was now a question of surplus-labour itself.⁴⁷

By the eighteenth century, it was clearly the case that production for export markets was providing the dynamic at the heart of the Hispanized Philippine economy. The founding of the

⁴⁷ Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1974, p 226.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

Royal Philippine Company in 1785 was carried out specifically to link American and Asian commerce. It led to the development of organised, non-subsistence agriculture, which as Agoncillo points out brought further hardship to the Filipinos "as they were forced to plant much-prized cash export crops from which they did not get any direct benefits at all".⁴⁸

The capitalist nature of the core of the economy is even more difficult to dispute by the middle of the nineteenth century. As Fast and Richardson argue:

Our analysis of the Philippines during the last century leads us to the firm view that the dominant forces at work were not feudal but most decidedly capitalist. The most advanced sectors of the economy, the sugar industry for example, were clearly responding to factors of capital accumulation and world market forces which bore no relationship to any definition of feudalism. Even the most backward sectors of the Philippine economy can, in our view, be described as feudal only by stretching that term beyond usefulness.⁴⁹

Agoncillo writes that with the official and permanent opening of Manila to international trade in 1834 came a sharp burst of development for the city and surrounding area. The total value of Philippine exports (mostly crops) increased from P4,795,000 in 1810 to P33,149,984 by 1894. There was an improvement in both economic and social infrastructure, with the opening of a mail service, banking facilities, newspapers, hotels, and so on.⁵⁰ Critically, the rural economy was increasingly drawn into the money economy of Manila and the other urban centres. "The large-scale production of 'big money' crops like sugar, indigo, coffee, copra, hemp and tobacco became a permanent fixture," writes Ofreneo of the expansion taking place in the 19th century. Loss of their farms to administrators, friars and others through landgrabbing became part of the rural masses' lot.⁵¹

The position advanced by Fast and Richardson, that the use of the term "feudalism" "fundamentally misrepresents the true nature of the forces at work in the Philippines during the last century"⁵² is convincing – and, I would argue, not just in connection with the nineteenth century. What then should be put in its place? The question is, itself, misplaced. It is neither useful nor necessary to force the Philippines of the Spanish period into a narrow categorisation.

⁴⁸ Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *A Short History of the Philippines*, New York: Mentor, 1969, p 89.

⁴⁹ Fast and Richardson, op cit, pp vi-vii.

⁵⁰ Agoncillo, op cit, pp 116-117.

⁵¹ Ofreneo, op cit, pp 7-9.

⁵² Fast and Richardson, op cit, p vi.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

As Mike Haynes has written in connection with the earlier, but similar, Spanish colonisation of the Americas, European expansion has to be understood as a *process* that reflects a mercantilist break with “pure” feudalism and which in turn helped shape the development of industrial capitalism in Europe and eventually the colonies.⁵³ Spain could not have exported feudalism because the very act of becoming an exo-European colonialist power marked the fact that it had ceased to be fully feudal.

3) To market, to market

I HAVE attempted up to this point to demonstrate that the historic use of the term “feudalism” (and hence “semifeudalism”) by writers both inside and outside the orbit of the CPP encounters difficulties. Although I do not intend to deal here in any depth with the vast literature on agriculture and social relations on the land in the Philippines, the essential point becomes clearer if we take a brief overview of the situation after World War Two.

First, it's useful to take a quick glance at the question of tenancy. Sison puts great store in his arguments on the continuation of, and the unalloyed rapacity inherent in, the tenancy system.

The most immediate manifestation of feudalism is the possession of vast areas of cultivable land by a few landlords who themselves do not till the land and who compel a big number of tenants to do the tilling. Feudal relations between the parasitic landlord class and the productive peasantry essentially involve the extortion of exorbitant land rent in cash or kind from the latter to the former. Such basic relations leave the tenant-peasants impoverished.⁵⁴

However, comparing Philippine government statistics that rank regions by rural poverty and by the percentage area under tenancy shows no correlation between the two factors. The poorest of 12 areas in 1985, the Western Visayas, was sixth in terms of tenancy. The four regions of Mindanao, in the middle ranking measured by poverty, have the lowest proportion of tenant farmers. The conclusion would seem to be that:

⁵³ Mike Haynes, “Columbus, the Americas and the Rise of Capitalism”, *International Socialism* 57, London, 1992, pp 55-99.

⁵⁴ Guerrero, op cit, p 90.

Tenancy per se is not the cause of rural unrest. For example, Central Luzon, which has the highest percentage of farm area under tenancy arrangements, has not been the major area subject to [NPA] insurgency in recent years. This could be attributed to the facts that among twelve regions, Central Luzon has the lowest poverty incidence at 44 percent, and that rice farmers belong to the low poverty incidence groups.⁵⁵

The expansion of capitalist farming was already gathering pace well before the war. The growth of the hacienda system for sugar farming in Negros around the turn of the century showed the way things were heading.⁵⁶ Benedict Kerkvliet, commenting on agriculture in Central Luzon in the 1930s, writes:

Capitalism, which had been creeping into Philippine society long before the Americans came, picked up speed in the twentieth century. Landowners in Central Luzon helped the spread of capitalism and a cash economy by responding to the market for agricultural produce. Far more than before, land ownership became a means to wealth. Land speculation – buying low and selling high – was one route; selling the land's produce was another.⁵⁷

Post-war, the pace quickened. Initially, growth was sustained by opening up new land. By the late 1950s that possibility was becoming closed off. Farmers turned increasingly to intensive growth, with the concomitant need to invest in modern inputs that involved a deeper relationship with the cash economy. Fertilizer, feeds, machines, high-yield seeds and, later, tractors, increasingly became part of the life of the rural masses.⁵⁸ As early as the 1950s and 1960s, many landlords of Central Luzon had mechanised most tasks.⁵⁹ Such developments hastened the creation of a substantial pool of landless labourers, who earned a seasonal pittance working for sharecroppers

⁵⁵ Yujiro Hayami, Ma. Agnes R. Quisumbing, Lourdes S. Adriano, *Toward an Alternative Land Reform Paradigm: A Philippine Perspective*, Manila: Ateneo De Manila University Press, 1990, pp 50-51.

⁵⁶ Violeta B. Lopez-Gonzaga and Michelle F. Decena, *The Socio-Politics of Sugar: Wealth, Power Formation and Change in Negros (1899-1985)*, Bacolod City: University of St. La Salle, 1989.

⁵⁷ Benedict J. Kerkvliet, *The Huk Rebellion: A Study of Peasant Revolt in the Philippines*, Quezon City: New Day, 1986, p 18.

⁵⁸ Ofreneo, op cit, pp 37-39. The process is still going on in painfully slow fashion. According to Roy Palomino, associate executive director of the Leyte Samar Rural Development Workers Association (LABRADOR), the main needs of farmers in Northern Samar remain, as of 1991, tools, fertilizer, seeds and regular access to the market. Interview with author, Tacloban, January 23, 1991.

⁵⁹ Kerkvliet, op cit, pp 268-269.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

or leaseholders.⁶⁰ Many become wage labourers for the major plantations or moved to Metro Manila to swell the shanty towns.⁶¹

By the time that Sison was systematically addressing the question of social relations on the land in the 1960s the changes were beginning to take on a qualitative tone. Between 1960 and 1970 agriculture's share of GDP remained static at 29 per cent while its share of the workforce dropped from 62 to 54 per cent and its share of export earnings from 89 to 68 per cent. The trend continued through the 1970s, alongside a marked increase in the proportion of export earnings coming from industry – from 11 per cent in 1960 to 59 per cent in 1980 to 73 per cent in 1991.⁶² Side by side with this relative decline in agriculture went a further fall in rural incomes, linked to the rise in the number of landless labourers – 48 per cent of the rural labour force, according to the 1980 census.⁶³

This is not to say that the Philippines was smoothly reaching economic "take-off". It has lagged and continues to lag most neighbouring economies. It continues to be plundered by multinationals. This has exacerbated the problems of poverty, fuelling the immediate attractiveness of the CPP's semifeudal position. But, as Rigoberto Tiglao argues: "What therefore appears to be feudal relations of production is actually a profit-maximising economic response of landlords drawn into a distinctive type of backward capitalism that is subordinated to imperialism."⁶⁴

In reality, many on the land fall into a number of overlapping categories. A group of farmers I interviewed in Barangay Somoge, near Catarman, Northern Samar, in 1991, followed that pattern. They were at one and the same time tenant farmers, giving up to two thirds of their crop to the landlord; minor players on the maize market, hiring a jeepney to take a small proportion of their crop to sell in Catarman; and waged labourers, working on coconut plantations.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Ofreneo, op cit, pp 53-54.

⁶¹ Lopez-Gonzaga estimates that 82 per cent of rural households in Negros Occidental are landless. Extract from paper included in *Agrarian Reform: Situations, Issues and Initiatives*, Honorio C. Batangantang, ed., Manila: Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung, 1989, p 49. In Mindanao, the bulk of landless labourers are plantation workers, excerpts from papers by Orlan Ravanera, Victoria P. Kanakan and Amelita King, *ibid*, p 45.

⁶² Hayami et al, op cit, p 23. In these figures, agriculture includes fishery and forestry. The 1991 figure is quoted in the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 3, 1992, p 40.

⁶³ Hayami et al, op cit, p 27.

⁶⁴ Rigoberto D. Tiglao, "Tenancy in an Underdeveloped Capitalism", *Feudalism and Capitalism in the Philippines*, op cit, p 53.

⁶⁵ Interview with Manseuito Aragenio, Florentino Dalmacion, Bienvenido Jayme and Leby Moreno, January 25, 1991.

4) The critics

IN THE 1990s, it was difficult to find people outside the ranks of the CPP prepared to defend the semifeudalism analysis.⁶⁶ Filomeno “Men” S. Sta Ana, a leading figure in the Freedom from Debt Coalition, said in 1991:

I basically agree [that the peasantry is producing for the market]. I don't consider it [semifeudalism] a very scientific term. Some ... define it as a means to accumulate capital and wealth through extra-economic means. That would mean even in Japan and the US semifeudalism could occur [through government connections and graft]. They don't want to class these people as entrepreneurs because they use government to accumulate wealth.⁶⁷

Even those, like Renato Constantino senior, who refer to past farming relations as feudal or semifeudal, argue that the terms do not hold today. In 1991, he said:

It's clear in my *Nationalist Alternative* that capitalist penetration in the countryside doesn't make it feudal or semifeudal. Many of our big landed estates are run on a capitalist basis, though I must admit there are feudal survivals in relationships. The term semifeudalism may have been valid 25 years ago but the transnationalisation of the economy has made it capitalistic, although there may be small plots of estates run on a feudal basis. On the whole, in Filipino agriculture we have capitalist relations.⁶⁸

Constantino's son, Renato junior, an active player in attempts to regroup the legal, social democratic Left, also has no time for the semifeudalist framework, regarding it as an attempt to justify a “Chinese” strategy in the Philippines, with its emphasis on the countryside and armed struggle. “This ignores that landless rural workers are within the milieu of the capitalist system,” he said.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ One such possible ally is R. Ferrer, who argues that the feudal colonial mode dominates the capitalist mode. The conclusion from this, however, is frankly so bizarre as to make the argument next to useless for the CPP – Ferrer argues that the consummation of capitalist development in the advanced economies will lead to the reassertion of the feudal law of motion there. See Rojas, op cit, p 23.

⁶⁷ Interview with author, Quezon City, June 25, 1991.

⁶⁸ Interview with author, Quezon City, June 25, 1991.

⁶⁹ Interview with author, Quezon City, June 25, 1991.

Much more important, in terms of practical politics, is that probably the most important group to have split from the CPP has now roundly rejected the semifeudal analysis. As Melencio puts it:

[This argument] is basically a critique of Sison's "semicolonial and semifeudal" characterization of the Philippine society as put forward in his book *Philippine Society and Revolution*, the "bible" of Filipino Maoists. However, it is not only a polemic against Sison's analysis but is also a general indictment of the Maoist characterization of a "semicolonial and semifeudal" Third World.⁷⁰

Melencio makes a sustained attack on Sison's position. He points out that while Lenin used the term "semifeudalism" to describe Czarist Russia, this went side by side with an insistence that the fundamental mode of production was capitalist. He ridicules the idea that feudalism can survive the introduction of the circulation of commodities.⁷¹ Specifically, he argues that four key components of what he understands as feudalism have long since passed away in the Philippines, namely: the direct producer holding the means of subsistence (land); a self-sufficient natural economy; surplus-labour appropriated by non-economic means; and the peasant class tied to the soil "as its accessory ... that is, feudal bondage in its real sense". Essentially, Melencio argues that the bulk of the peasantry has been "freed" in the Marxist sense: "The overwhelming majority of the tillers have been transformed into 'free agents', into the proletarians and semi-proletarians in the open market of a commodity economy."⁷²

Melencio accuses Sison of equivocating between seeing semifeudalism as a transitional period (but ducking the necessity of a decision about which system predominates, feudalism or capitalism) and regarding it as distinct mode of production. He attempts to break the impasse by pointing once again to Lenin, who argued that Russian society had to be understood as being in transition and that, in Melencio's words: "The imperative is to determine which of the two systems is eliminating the other under the influence of the whole course of economic evolution."⁷³ Melencio then proceeds to criticise Sison for deliberately underplaying the size of the Filipino working class.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Melencio, op cit, p 76. Melencio acknowledges that his article is essentially a summary of a paper issued by the breakaway Manila-Rizal Regional Committee of the CPP.

⁷¹ Ibid, pp 76-77.

⁷² Ibid, pp 80-81.

⁷³ Ibid, pp 81-82.

⁷⁴ Ibid, erratum p 1.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

The conclusion of his impressive work strikes right to the heart of the legitimacy of the CPP's project:

What then is the significance of the debate on the correct analysis of Philippine society? It is not only a question of consistency in theory but a question of correct strategy and tactics. Sison's "semicolonial and semifeudal" analysis of Philippine society is but an alibi to justify his "protracted war strategy", an alibi to justify a thoroughly Maoist line for the Philippine revolution.⁷⁵

5) Feudalism – a conclusion

THIS IS not the place to make definitive statements about the way Spanish colonisation impacted the Philippines. But I would suggest that there is sufficient reason to doubt that the Hispanized Philippines could usefully be described as feudal – and if that is the case, the term has even less usefulness in the twentieth century.

Spain was already breaking from "pure" feudalism before its conquistadors set foot in the Philippines. The *encomienda* system was more akin to plunder than a systematic mode of production. By the eighteenth century, the world market was having its first impact on the archipelago. And by the next century, capitalist relations were becoming the norm in those parts of the country tied in to the money economy. Today, the majority of the rural population are poor because of low wages rather than extra-economic extortion by the landlord class.

If this is so, it poses a substantial challenge to Sison's theory of semifeudalism. Given the theory's centrality, this weakness throws into question the CPP's broader project.

ON THE TRAIL OF THE COMPRADOR

THE SECOND crucial element of Sison's argument relates to class. In concluding his speech of April 9, 1986, mentioned above, he argued: "The most important feature of the semifeudal economy to cite is the dominance of the comprador big bourgeoisie over all other economic

⁷⁵ Ibid, p 87. Reid also gives a useful summary of the way in which those who left the CPP in 1992-93 have broken, in different ways from the semifeudal analysis, *op cit*, pp 67-71.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

classes.”⁷⁶ The compradors, according to his position, are linked to the landlords both productively and commercially, but are linked to overseas capitalism merely commercially.⁷⁷ The flip side of this coin is the weakness of what he terms the nationalist bourgeoisie.

In his *Philippine Society and Revolution*, Sison argues that the Philippine ruling class is essentially the handmaiden of imperialism, especially of the American variety. To the extent that a “national bourgeoisie” exists, its prospects and development are stunted by the Philippines’ sharply unequal relationship with the world economy, expressed above all in the domination of overseas companies. It is also subordinate and subject to the power and whims of the big landlords, compradors and bureaucrat capitalists, although its members seek their own upward mobility into these class fractions. Therefore, Sison concludes, this national bourgeoisie is a potential (albeit unreliable and wavering) ally of the national democratic revolution.⁷⁸

Such an analysis essentially rules out the existence of an indigenous, Filipino, big bourgeoisie, with its own interests and dynamics of accumulation. Capitalists, according to Sison’s schema, are by and large either powerful thanks to the patronage of foreigners, or small and patriotic. The political conclusion from this is clear – to the extent that a business person identifies with nationalist economic development, he or she is an ally and must be treated accordingly. This analysis is questioned by a range of Filipino intellectuals and leftwing thinkers. Again, to turn to Constantino senior:

Those influenced by the Chinese definition of the term [bourgeoisie] look at the national bourgeoisie as against the so-called comprador bourgeoisie and the bureaucratic capitalists. I think with the developments in the country, with the influx of transnational corporation control, I wouldn’t make this drastic distinction between those tied up with multinationals and those who have the ability of expanding accumulation without international tie-ups.⁷⁹

Businessman and former politician Roland Concepcion had investments in Australia, Malaysia, Thailand, Canada, while still maintaining ties with US multinationals, Constantino added. People like Eduardo Cojuangco (San Miguel corporation and later an adviser to President Joseph Estrada) clearly played the role required to be part of the big Filipino bourgeoisie. And the Chamber of

⁷⁶ Sison, “Semifeudalism in the Philippines: Myth or Reality?”, op cit, p 62.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p 67.

⁷⁸ Guerrero, op cit, pp 136-137.

⁷⁹ Interview, op cit.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

Filipino Entrepreneurs, with more than 1000 medium producers, employing from 12 to 50 each, played a role in the economy, he said.⁸⁰

Sta Ana shares a similar position.

It isn't monolithic. There's small businessmen and on the other hand there's big business which has a very intimate relationship with foreign investors and foreign financial magnates. The Filipino big bourgeoisie can't escape having a relationship with foreign capital. But there are also big Filipino businessmen who are dependent on imported components but who've developed their own business empires without the investment of foreigners.

Let's look at the Filipino Cabinet [under Aquino]. Concepcion [since replaced] is an exemplar of the Filipino bourgeoisie, owns a food conglomerate and is a manufacturer of home appliances. He started as a national bourgeois who struggled against foreign capital. But in the process, with the accumulation of capital and wealth, he was able to build his own empire and has carved his own niche in Filipino business and in one sense he's competing with foreign capital ...

His successor Garrucho also represents Filipino big business. He manages and owns a firm that manufactures fire lighters. [Another Cabinet member] is also a big businessman who owns logging firms in Mindanao. These are people who are not with the multinationals or involved in trading. They have the same philosophy as the multinationals. They're in favour of free markets, the IMF program ...

The trend is difficult to tell because of Aquino's eclectic government. She straddles both wings of the bourgeoisie. Finance and the Central Bank are technocrats and pro-IMF and foreign banks, Trade and Industry are pro-big bourgeoisie. But they have more in common than divides them.⁸¹

Solita "Winnie" Collas-Monsod, Secretary for Economic Planning until June 1989 when she fell out with President Aquino over capping debt repayments, and later Professor at the University of

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Interview, op cit.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

the Philippines School of Economics, is similarly scathing about the national democratic analysis.

[Is there a genuinely independent Filipino big business class?] None whatsoever ... They're in the pockets of transnationals because they're getting profits from it. They are not the compradors, that theory is all wet. The big businessmen now are scions and descendents of the compradors of before, they got their money that way, they're going to keep their money any way they can ...

You asked if there is a Filipino big business class who is genuinely independent, and I said no. But is there a Filipino big business – you wanna bet! I mean, good grief! Roland Concepcion, of Concepcion Industries, the air conditioning, etc, etc, they've been protected since 1955. On the other hand you've got somebody like Dante Santos, who is in white goods, and Dante Santos says I can compete with anybody because long ago he said this is the way to go.⁸²

As with the debate on feudalism and semifeudalism, the loose use of terminology among protagonists creates problems. Sta Ana, for example, uses the term comprador to refer to big Filipino concerns like San Miguel Corporation that are highly dependent on overseas financing.⁸³ Sison uses it to refer to Filipinos who import luxury goods for the landlord class.⁸⁴

The second difficulty arises in defining who are Filipinos. Many Filipino nationalists are reluctant fully to embrace those of Chinese descent as compatriots. This reflects a contradiction at the heart of Filipino nationalism – the same pride that negatively defines all Filipinos as *not* Americans has trouble coming to grips with the positive – that those of Aboriginal or Chinese descent are Filipinos alongside those from Malay stock.⁸⁵ This says something about the plastic and contingent nature of nationalism, of which more in the next chapter. But for the purposes of delineating a Filipino bourgeoisie, I am going to stick here to a simple definition, embracing all those who hold Filipino nationality.

⁸² Interview with author, Manila, June 26, 1991.

⁸³ Interview, op cit.

⁸⁴ Sison, "Semifeudalism in the Philippines: Myth or Reality?", op cit, p 69.

⁸⁵ See, for example, Renato Constantino senior, "Nationalism and Southeast Asia", Nationalism and Liberation, Quezon City: Karrel, no date, pp 35-37.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

Yoshihara Kunio, in research carried out between 1970 and 1981 on the ownership of the 250 biggest manufacturing companies in the Philippines, concluded that 163, that is about two-thirds, were owned domestically.

Foreign companies dominate in soft drinks and syrup concentrate, dairy products, fruit processing (canned pineapples), pharmaceuticals, toiletries, other chemicals, petroleum refining, tyres, certain types of metals (steel fabrication, copper wires, and other non-ferrous metals), and certain types of machinery and equipment (construction machinery, telephone equipment, sewing machines, and electric light bulbs). Chinese companies [meaning those owned by Chinese Filipino citizens] dominate in coconut oil, some food products, tobacco (cigarettes in particular), textiles (hosiery and knitting in particular), plastic products, footwear, glass and certain types of metals (tubes and pipes, merchant bars, wire rods, nails, bolts, etc., and containers). Filipino companies [Malay-Filipinos] dominate in sugar, industrial chemicals, fertilizers, cement, certain types of metals (rolling mills, galvanizing plant, and tin plate), and are fairly strong in electrical appliances.⁸⁶

Taken by asset size, overseas companies (80 per cent of which are American) dominate the top 25 by 13 to 12. But domestic companies dominate the top 50 by 28 to 22, and thereafter by an increasing proportion. Among the older industries (sugar, coconut oil) there was a trend towards Filipinization, Kunio concluded.⁸⁷

The point here is not to disprove the substantial overseas stake in the Philippine economy but to demonstrate that the comprador/nationalist bourgeoisie dichotomy set up by Sison and stoutly defended by him and the CPP over more than two decades is at best inadequate, at worst a confusing distortion of the true nature of the Filipino ruling class and its relationship to the world market.

As Constantino, Sta Ana, and Collas-Monsod have argued above, there are businesspeople with heavy links overseas, those with fewer, and many inbetween. In practice, access to overseas patrons, capital, patents, etc, is part of the process of building, at however limited a pace, an

⁸⁶ Yoshihara Kunio, *Philippine Industrialization: Foreign and Domestic Capital*, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1985, p 37.

⁸⁷ Ibid, pp 40-41.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

independent centre of capital accumulation.⁸⁸ To say otherwise is to suggest that capitalists in the United States, the world's biggest creditor nation, are "comprador" or that Australia, with its historic dependence on overseas investment, is still a colony.⁸⁹

The debt burden carried by the Philippines, \$US30 billion by 1991 figures,⁹⁰ further illustrates the argument. In national democratic and broader nationalist circles, the debt is taken as proof simple of the nation's subordination to the major powers. There is, of course, a substantial element of truth in the proposition. The Philippines as a developing country enters into world competition on unequal terms on virtually every front, including in the finance sector. But the Philippines debt has undergone a substantial restructuring in recent years – and the majority is now held domestically.⁹¹ In other words, the sacrifices demanded of the mass of the population by successive governments in the name of debt-servicing in practice go to swell the wealth of a small fraction of fellow Filipinos, those who own the banks. As Collas-Monsod puts it:

What they [the government] are doing with these debt-equity conversions is substituting domestic debt for external debt and would you believe they are substituting it when domestic debt interest rate is 20 per cent and external debt interest rate is 10 per cent. The stupidity of it all ... Who's for it? The commercial banks. They're dying for it. They make money on the transaction because they're the conduits.

[So the domestic debt is held primarily by Filipino commercial banks?] Of course, for Filipinos ... and what does that kind of debt do? Because interest rates go up ... investors, Filipino investors, forget the foreign investors, because foreign investment in the Philippines has historically played a very, very small part in our growth and development, Filipino investors have a choice, they're going to put it into a productive activity where there is risk, and where the payout period may be say, six years or seven

⁸⁸ For example, two-thirds of the chief executives of the commercial banks began with the Philippine branches of the United States bank, Citibank, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, September 3, 1992, p 45.

⁸⁹ For more on the relationship between Australia and the world economy see David Glanz, "Dinky-di Domination: Australian Imperialism and the South Pacific", *Socialist Review* (Melbourne) 2, 1990, pp 34-64.

⁹⁰ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 30, 1992, p 62.

⁹¹ Sixty per cent is held domestically, according to Collas-Monsod, interview, op cit. Rigoberto Tiglao endorses the general position, arguing that private overseas debt has largely become a Philippine government responsibility, and that debt repayments are soaring, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, July 30, 1992, p 63. On the same page he quotes a confidential February 1992 World Bank report: "Domestic interest payments by the public sector accounted for nearly the entire fiscal deficit."

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

years, right, or they're just going to put it in T-bills where they're going to get 22 per cent a year, or as high as 34 per cent. Who's going to win there, folks?⁹²

And who does own the Filipino commercial banks? Lucio Tan, reckoned to be the third or fourth richest Filipino, controls Allied Banking Corp., the eighth largest private bank. Tan also owns Fortune Tobaccos and Asia Brewery and has a controlling stake in Philippine Airlines. Among the smaller shareholders in Tan's vehicle for dominating the airline, PR Holdings, are the Ayalas, Sorianos and Antonio Cojuangco, who controls San Miguel, large landholdings, and Philippine Long Distance Telephone.⁹³ The chair of the telephone company, Alfonso Yuchengco, is in turn chair of the Rizal Commercial Banking Corp.⁹⁴ A Finance Secretary in the administration of President Fidel Ramos was Ramon del Rosario, head of a commercial bank.⁹⁵

Many of these business people are bound by ties of family, of business alliances, university background, or simply of membership of the Makati Business Club. Furthermore, the Philippines finance and business scene is increasingly characterised by business people who diversify. Robert Coyiuto has broken out of insurance to control Oriental Petroleum and Minerals Corp., which runs wells in West Linapacan; Elena Lim made money exporting prawns to Japan and has moving into consumer electronics and car assembly; William Gatchalian went from domestic plastics production to become a major exporter of plastic bags and in turn moved into real estate and banking.⁹⁶

Perhaps the most damning evidence that the CPP's orientation towards the nationalist bourgeoisie does not hold water comes in a wry admission from leading member Satur Ocampo. Asked whether the party had faced up to the contradiction between organising among workers and wooing allies among their "national bourgeois" employers, he admitted:

Well in practice it has not produced any concrete results, but the policy was that the NDF program, for instance, called for protection and promotion of the interests of national entrepreneurs vis a vis the monopoly positions of the multinationals. So there was readiness in the concept of subordinating first the workers' interest for better wages to the interests of the national bourgeoisie – if they're in active competition with the

⁹² Interview, op cit.

⁹³ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, January 28, 1993, pp 52-53. Given the fluidity of the corporate world, some ownerships may have changed by the time of writing.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, March 19, 1992, p 24.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, September 3, 1992, p 38.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, September 3, 1992, p 44.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

multinationals. Now this has not come about because the national bourgeoisie cannot actively compete, because government is not behind them and in fact the conventional wisdom within government is that the protectionist policies instituted from the 1950s had been counterproductive in the sense that it produced relative hibernation of the import substitution industries ...

So that policy remains in the realm of theory until a palpable group of Filipino national entrepreneurs try to assert themselves against the monopoly interests of multinationals. Our experience in the last several years is that we have never been able to get the national bourgeoisie to organise. They themselves have this very strong mistrust with one another, they could not get together to fight foreign competition.⁹⁷

CONCLUSION

FOR SISON, the term “semifeudalism” is not simply a description of a relatively backward, developing economy. It also underpins a strategy of mobilising the peasantry to fight for the national democratic revolution, which in turn is the only basis on which a later fight for socialism could be launched.

In this chapter I have attempted to throw doubt on the usefulness of describing the colonial Philippine economy as feudal, and therefore of describing it as semifeudal today. I have also attempted to show that the role and interlinkages of the Filipino ruling class are much more complex than Sison’s dichotomy of comprador/nationalist bourgeoisie would allow.

None of this is an attempt to deny the poverty experienced day by day by the rural masses in the Philippines, nor the substantial stake held in the Philippine economy by American, Japanese, Australian and other overseas companies and banks. It is, however, intended to bolster the arguments put forward by those who regard the core of the Philippine economy as capitalist. The various consequences of this position will be drawn out in later chapters.

Turner notes that many anti-imperialist, pro-nationalist Filipino writers have failed to define their use of the term “feudalism” in the Philippine context.⁹⁸ The use of the term “comprador”,

⁹⁷ Interview with author, Quezon City, June 28, 1993.

⁹⁸ Turner, *op cit*, p 469.

CHAPTER TWO: SEMIFEUDALISM – A THEORY AT ODDS WITH THE FACTS

as we have seen, is equally fluid. This is, I believe, no coincidence. Filipino nationalism, as shall be discussed in the next chapter, benefits from a blurring of the perceptions of class divisions within society, and the term “feudalism” helps sustain a kind of political folk memory that appears to pit *all* Filipinos against colonialism, yesterday and today.

Similarly, the comforting myth that all Filipinos, except a tiny number of compradors, have an interest in the nationalists’ plans for economic development helps bolster the CPP’s supporters. A more precise reading of the situation would seem to make both these positions uncomfortably untenable.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

INTRODUCTION

MORE THAN 400 years of colonial rule has left a deep imprint on Filipinos' sense of national identity. From March 17, 1521, the day that Ferdinand Magellan reached the archipelago, to July 4, 1946, when the flag of the newly independent Republic of the Philippines was raised for the first time, western influences determined the direction and speed of Philippine national development.¹ There would be few who would deny that western, specifically American, influences have continued to make their mark on the Philippines since. Journalist Ed Aurelio Reyes articulates a popular sentiment in referring ironically to the country's "flag independence".

This could only be "independence" *under effective foreign domination* because it came not from a successful defense of liberty won in struggle. Our victory, our liberty, had been snatched at the last minutes of our struggle against Spain. And *liberty granted* us later by this new colonizer *could never be real*. And so, our beloved Philippine Islands, the colony, had become the "Republic of the Philippines," the *semi-colony*.²

Reyes is writing from a national democratic perspective. But the sense of disquiet and national injustice stretches throughout the circles of the Left, and beyond. It has been expressed at various times in the efforts to – among other things – establish a national language in Pilipino; build an indigenous manufacturing and processing industry; define an independent foreign policy; and write a Filipino history of the Philippines.

¹ This period was, of course, punctuated by the first and short-lived Republic of the Philippines, proclaimed by Emilio Aguinaldo in 1898.

² Ed Aurelio Reyes, *The Philippines, A Century Thence: An Open Letter to Rizal*, Manila: Educar, 1990, p 12. Emphases in the original.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

While there are shades of difference in both theory and application, there is also what amounts to universal agreement that nationalism is a progressive and useful tool for the Left to use, notwithstanding its acknowledged ambiguities. The term is understood differently in different parts of society. So in the rural areas, national liberation and the liberation of the land from the landlords are seen as one and the same. It is probably for this reason that the CPP (and the PKP to a lesser extent before it) has had success in building stable bases among the peasantry despite an otherwise complex ideology.

In urban areas, nationalism can mean different things to different people. Among students and intellectuals it is measured much more in economic, cultural and ideological terms.³ For some it is rejecting American culture. For others, in the past, it meant campaigning against American military bases. Among the poor, though, it can take on yet another meaning. One party member told me in 1993 of her initial success in organising slum dwellers in Tondo, Manila, against "imperialism". She was brought down to earth, however, when she discovered that her followers understood imperialism to be the ethnic Chinese traders in the neighbouring thoroughfare.

In preparing this chapter, therefore, one difficulty that I faced was being unable to find writers, political leaders or trade unionists on record against nationalism.⁴ Questions posed about its nature and usefulness have often been met with puzzlement or incomprehension. This has been a practical obstacle to developing the work, but it is also an unintendedly eloquent commentary on the hegemony of nationalism in the Philippine polity.

The way in which the CPP has responded to nationalism is the main subject of this chapter. That response has taken as its starting point in both theory and practice the legitimacy of nationalism and the party's strategy of steeping itself in it. Yet that identification with nationalism runs counter to the classical Marxist tradition, a point which Sison as chief party ideologue

³ See, for instance, Renato Constantino, *Nationalism and Liberation*, Quezon City: Karrel, no date, p 22: "In the past, the nationalist struggle focused on political independence...Today, national oppression still exists. It consists of the economic domination of former colonies by transnational corporations of the advanced capitalist states."

⁴ There is one exception, whose very existence would seem to definitively prove the rule. P. N. Abinales, in a brief essay discussing the impact on the nationalist project of the closure of the US military bases, criticises nationalism in refreshingly open terms: "No matter how inspiring, [it] has thus become the *bete noire* of all other ideologies, constricting universalist notions into the narrow confines of a national map, and obstructing whatever aspirations for a united humanity." "Searching for the Philippine Eden in the Post-Bases Era", *Kasarinlan* 7, no. 4, 1992, p 10. Later in the volume Miriam Coronel Ferrer covers the same question (of the bases and nationalism) in much more detail without ever questioning the legitimacy of nationalism. "The Dynamics of the Opposition to the US Bases in the Philippines", pp 62-87.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

acknowledges. Responding to the observation that while Lenin rejected nationalism, the CPP seems to be proud of its role as *the* standard bearer of Philippine nationalism, he said:

First I must make clear that nationalism is fundamentally contrary to Marxism. It is a fundamental precept of Marxism that you cannot complete the socialist revolution and make communism in your particular country without linking your socialist revolution with the socialist revolution and national liberation movements elsewhere ...

The Marxists appropriated the term in the '50s after the crushing of the Communist Party and the revolutionary movement in the early '50s. So certain members of the Communist Party, the old Communist Party, the merger party of the CP and SP, thought it would be good to use Aesopian language. Then these elements wrote articles of their own, a few ones. In the main they wrote for real bourgeois nationalist politicians, the most prominent of whom was Claro Mayo Recto.

... Then those who studied Marxism-Leninism found it also convenient to appropriate nationalism. So the term became dignified. Even among Marxist-Leninists ... Indeed, communists are patriots, no? But they are not nationalist. Between nationalism and internationalism they're basically internationalist, even as they don't lose their patriotic character.

... A certain amount of being a patriot against imperialism, a certain amount of patriotism is permissible, but only up to the point of propelling and combating a foreign power. But nationalism as a systemised ideology, making the interests of one nation the overriding concern, that's reactionary.⁵

Let us leave aside the fact that Sison is simply wrong on the PKP's tradition, as we saw in Chapter One. The essential point that flows from this confused and defensive series of formulations is that, on the one hand, the party's founder and primary theoretician claims to stand in the classical Marxist tradition. (Although whether he believed his own comments is dubious – his response was hesitant and flustered and is reflected nowhere else in his body of work or in the general texts of the party.)

⁵ Interview with author, Utrecht, July 8, 1993.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

On the other, he is defending a patriotism⁶ which, in day-to-day practice amounts in the minds of the vast majority of party members and supporters to an unqualified endorsement of nationalism.⁷ As Kathleen Weekley notes: "In the same way that he defines all exploitative social relations in the rural areas as 'feudalism', Sison uses 'nationalism' too, as an almost ahistorical category, the details of whose *content* has changed over the centuries."⁸

Indeed, notwithstanding Sison's comments above, that patriotism/nationalism is the prime cutting edge of the party's propaganda. This chapter aims to explore this contradiction within the party's arguments on nationalism, and to examine the origins and consequences of incorporating nationalism into its ideas and its practice. It is the argument of this thesis that the CPP's nationalism is related to its strategic orientation on an alliance of classes, including the peasantry and sections of the bourgeoisie, and to its aim of achieving national democratic, rather than socialist, revolution.

PHILIPPINE NATIONALISM – CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

THE CPP has placed itself within the nationalist framework from its earliest days. As the introduction to *Philippine Society and Revolution* puts it:

As a struggle for national sovereignty, the present national-democratic struggle continues the Revolution of 1896, the war for independence against Spain which was brutally aborted by the guns of a rising imperialism power, the United States. Yet the present struggle, in Sison's view, is also "a new type of national-democratic revolution, a continuation of the Philippine Revolution of 1896 and yet a renewal of strength in a more advanced way".⁹

⁶ Sison's use of the term was no slip of the tongue. Writing as Amado Guerrero in 1970, he uses the term in his introduction to *Philippine Society and Revolution*: "The author offers this book as a starting point for every patriot in the land to make further class analysis and social investigation as the basis for concrete and sustained revolutionary action." Oakland: International Association of Filipino Patriots, 1979, p xvii.

⁷ Later in the Utrecht interview, Sison said that: "This dullness, you might say, this dullness makes nationalism a dignified term among Marxists, among supposed Marxist-Leninists and supposed members of the Communist Party of the Philippines. [It] is a reflection of...the lack or scarcity of Marxist-Leninist education in the Communist Party of the Philippines. That is now an object of criticism and repudiation in the current rectification movement." There is, however, no evidence that the intermingling of the party's Marxism and nationalism has come under challenge.

⁸ Kathleen Weekley, *From Vanguard to Rearguard: The Communist Party of the Philippines 1969-1993*. PhD thesis, University of Sydney, August 1996, p 54.

⁹ Guerrero, op cit, p iv. The introduction is written in the name of the International Association of Filipino Patriots.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

So the CPP's project is consciously posed as part of a nationalist continuity. The difference is that:

... unlike the 1896 Revolution, which was led and ultimately betrayed by the *ilustrados*, the Filipino liberal bourgeoisie, the present movement for national democracy must be led by the most advanced class in the era of imperialist and capitalist decline, the Filipino working class.¹⁰

The party and other national democrats have subjected the development of Philippine nationalism to an analysis framed by the assumptions above.

As nationalist historians, Sison, Renato Constantino senior and Teodoro Agoncillo all place great stress on the role of localised peasant revolts during the Spanish period in establishing a tradition of resistance within the Philippines.¹¹ But the starting point of a coherent, self-defining Filipino nationalism is identified with the ideas and writings of the Propaganda Movement in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, and in particular with Jose Rizal, effectively adopted as the father of the nation.

Rizal's was a hesitant nationalism, reflecting the life experience of a section of the ruling class (*Filipinos*, those born in the archipelago, as opposed to the *Peninsulares*, those born in Iberia) whose practical and emotional ties to Spain had been weakened. On the one hand the desire for autonomy, as a minimum condition, was growing. On the other, they were held back by the fear that a serious fight for independence would release social tensions among the peasantry and the new urban workforce that would sweep away traditional land relationships.

The dilemma suffuses Rizal's most famous novel, *The Social Cancer*. In a telling passage, the hero, Don Crisostomo Ibarra, born in the Philippines but educated in Europe, explains his philosophy:

¹⁰ Ibid, p iv.

¹¹ See, for example, Guerrero, op cit, pp 9-10; Renato Constantino with Letizia R. Constantino. *The Philippines: A Past Revisited*. Manila: No publisher, 1989, pp 133-149; Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *A Short History of the Philippines*. New York: Mentor, 1960, pp 113-114. We cannot talk about Filipino resistance at this stage as such a thing did not exist, of which more below.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

I will never be the one to lead the multitude to get by force what the government does not think proper to grant, no! If I should ever see that multitude armed I would place myself on the side of the government, for in such a mob I should not see my countrymen. I desire the country's welfare, therefore I would build a schoolhouse. I seek it by means of instruction, by progressive advancement, without light there is no road.¹²

Such a philosophy underpinned Rizal's own actions – he refused to take part in the 1896 revolt but still received martyrdom at the hands of the Spanish authorities that year. Sison, somewhat remarkably, makes essentially no comment on Rizal's hesitancy in *Philippine Society and Revolution*,¹³ which although brief, purports to be a primer for CPP members. It falls to Constantino to point out the limitations of Rizal's demands – for assimilation and equal rights within the Spanish empire.¹⁴

Rather than openly attack Rizal, Sison criticises him by default by lauding the "second wave" of modern Filipino nationalism, the Kataastaasang Kagalang-galang na Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan (The Most Venerable Supreme Society of the Sons of the People), commonly known as the Katipunan.¹⁵ The Katipunan, led by Andres Bonifacio, clearly marked a shift from the aim of assimilation to that of independence. It grew out of the defeat of Rizal and the Propagandists. (Bonifacio was a member of Rizal's La Liga Filipina and founded the Katipunan on Rizal's arrest and dispatch into exile in 1892.)

It represented the aspirations of an urban mass largely in transition. The layer of artisans was in the process of being broken down with the advent of elements of mass production, for instance in the tobacco industry.¹⁶ The Katipunan philosophy reflected that transition – on the one hand dismissive of what it saw as a pusillanimous Filipino elite, but on the other hand not yet able to articulate the kind of clear social demands that the organised working class (and, indeed, peasantry) would be putting forward within a few decades.

Sison's summarises the Katipunan phenomenon thus:

¹² Jose Rizal, *The Social Cancer*, Manila: Philippine Education Company, 1969, p 392.

¹³ Guerrero, op cit, p 14.

¹⁴ Constantino, op cit, pp 154-158.

¹⁵ Weekley, op cit, p 16, quotes a different Tagalog name, Kamahalmahalan at Kataastaasang Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan, citing S. V. Alvarez, *The Katipunan and the Revolution: Memoirs of a General*, (P. C. Malay, trans.), Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1992, p 4.

¹⁶ Constantino, op cit, pp 161-166.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

The Philippine Revolution of 1896 was a national-democratic revolution of the old type. Though Bonifacio came from the working class,¹⁷ he was not in possession of proletarian ideology.¹⁸ The guiding ideology of the revolution was that of the liberal bourgeoisie. Its classic model was the French Revolution and Bonifacio himself was inspired mainly by its ideas. At any rate, the revolution asserted the sovereignty of the Filipino people, the protection and promotion of civil liberties, the confiscation of the friar estates and the elimination of theocratic rule.¹⁹

The CPP's relationship to the earlier nationalists, the criticism and the continuity, find their echo in Sison's treatment of the twentieth century nationalists. So, in dealing with Senator Claro Mayo Recto's campaigns in the 1950s, he argues:

The main content of these bourgeois nationalist speeches was actually anti-imperialism against the US economic, political and military control over the Philippines. So the term was put to good use, and you might say that Recto was the prominent fellow that spoke well against US imperialism at a time when the Marxist-Leninists could not speak out.²⁰

When it comes to Ferdinand Marcos, who flirted with nationalist language to give intellectual legitimacy to his project of national economic development, Sison simply says:

Marcos was an inconsistent user of the term nationalism to express displeasure at his imperialist master. But you see, bourgeois nationalist leaders like Chiang Kaishek to Marcos would speak of the nation as the be all and end all and yet they are the most traitorous to their own nation. This is one thing, because of the class base, of nationalism. After all, the bourgeoisie insofar as it is bourgeois, with its class self-interest, would accept the international arrangement made by the biggest capitalist powers, so they easily become traitors.²¹

¹⁷ This is stretching the point, as Constantino's analysis of the Katipunan leadership indicates (see previous footnote).

¹⁸ This in no way stops CPP-influenced organisations celebrating Bonifacio Day, which is treated alongside May Day as an anniversary of the Left and the mass movements.

¹⁹ Guerrero, op cit, p 15. Weekley, however, quotes a slightly different version of Sison's analysis which credits the Katipunan with being the first national democrats. Jose Maria Sison, "The National Democratic Movement and the Political Activist", *On National Democracy*. Quezon City: Aklatang Gising Na, no date, pp 1-3. She then notes: "With a stroke of the pen, Sison rendered Philippine history linear and presented his new national democratic project as the contemporary stage in a teleological process." Weekley, op cit, p 23.

²⁰ Interview, op cit.

²¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

The defining nature then of the party's left-wing nationalism is the way that it sets out to give a class basis to the divisions between "traitors" and "patriots". The very fact of operating within this framework in turn underlines the essentially unproblematic relationship between the Philippine Left and nationalism. It is this relationship which informs the general, public line of the party.

That the CPP has taken this course is not unexpected. Not only did the party accept from the beginning the Stalinist concept that any prospect of socialist revolution had to be preceded by a period of capitalist relative "normality" (which, naturally, included full national independence), but it was established at the height of the Vietnam War. Its founding cadres had cut their teeth on demonstrations against American and Philippine involvement in attempts to crush the Vietnamese national liberation movement. Their world view was shaped by ideas of Third World national liberation struggle. In the absence of a socialist current committed to internationalism, their conclusions were not surprising.

The party's orientation is a further indication of the underlying continuity in thought with the PKP, despite the estrangement of the two organisations. As we saw in Chapter One, the PKP's adoption of nationalism flowed from the degeneration of the Comintern (of which more below) and its espousal of "socialism in one country". The breach between the two wings of Filipino communism had no impact on this underlying position, despite the CPP's orientation towards Beijing rather than Moscow. So, from the beginning, the CPP placed itself firmly on the far left of the nationalist spectrum. It set out to prove itself the most courageous force fighting for national liberation. If it had a criticism of the PKP, it was for putting *too much* emphasis on the domestic class struggle, at the expense of the task of national liberation.

As Kathleen Weekley notes: "Sison praises the Communist Party's efforts in the 1930s to build up 'an effective trade union movement' ... However, he then criticises the Party leadership for not placing the right emphasis on the national element of the national democratic revolution. The Party had failed, he said, to differentiate properly between those class fractions that could be useful to the revolution and those that must emphatically be opposed."²² She then quotes Sison:

There was a failure to make use of the patriotic inclinations of the national bourgeoisie in the strategy and tactics of the Communist Party of the Philippines then ... The [PKP]

²² Weekley, *op cit*, p 26.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

was not able to distinguish between the national bourgeoisie and the pro-imperialist comprador-bourgeoisie and between the national bourgeoisie and the foreign monopoly capitalists.²³

By contrast, the CPP became the party of the super-nationalists. Nationalism is not challenged, let alone rejected. Instead it is seen as a positive concept, not to be trusted at the hands of “bad” bourgeois politicians, but of some value at the hands of “good” ones like Senator Recto. It seems reasonable to interpret Sison’s disclaimer of nationalism given to this interviewer as an clumsy and embarrassed attempt to conjure up a Marxist “orthodoxy”, which serves only to emphasise the more the extent to which the CPP has taken on the mantle of nationalism.

THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

IN CHAPTER One, I argued that the CPP inherited the PKP’s orientation of revolution by stages. In Chapter Two, I argued that this was informed by the Maoist experience, and that the CPP understood its task as to lead a military struggle along national democratic lines. The concept of the national democratic revolution is not unique to the CPP. Its genesis lay in the rightward trajectory of the Comintern after 1928, the year that marked the final victory of Stalin over Trotsky for control over the direction of the Russian party, and therefore, the world movement.

The Sixth Congress of the Comintern that year adopted “Theses on the Revolutionary Movement in the Colonies and Semi-Colonies”. The theses incorporated for the first time in the Comintern’s history the concept of a two-stage revolutionary strategy in colonial countries. As Huynh Kim Khanh notes:

A lengthy resolution defined the “bourgeois-democratic revolutions” in colonial and semicolonial countries as the first stage in a socialist revolution. Communists of these countries were instructed to help overthrow foreign imperialist domination and establish independent republics in preparation for the second stage: a socialist revolution that would establish the dictatorship of the proletariat.²⁴

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism 1925-1945*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986, p 107.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

This stageist approach was a post facto attempt to justify the Comintern's approach to the earlier, 1925-27, Chinese revolutionary situation. Instructions to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to ally itself with the nationalists of the Guomindang,²⁵ indeed to subordinate itself and hand over its membership lists, had led to disaster.²⁶ But, paradoxically, in the wake of the revolution's defeat, a strategy that emphasised caution had even greater appeal.

The further development that consolidated stageism into the Stalinised tradition was the rise to power of Hitler in 1933, followed the next year by an attempted fascist coup in Paris. The Comintern, by then firmly defending the national interest of the new bureaucratic ruling class in the Soviet Union, cast around for a strategy that would help it pull Britain and France into alliance against Hitler.

Such a strategy could only be undermined if the communist parties in those two countries encouraged robust class struggle. Thus the Comintern in 1934 executed a turn from its "class against class" Third Period characterisation of the period and declared the need to build cross-class Popular Fronts against fascism. Such Popular Fronts were to include middle-class parties, and were to restrict themselves to non-revolutionary politics.

In the colonial countries, this put an enormously contradictory pressure on the nascent communist parties, given that their rulers were, more often than not, allies of the Soviet Union. As I noted in Chapter One, it meant that in the Philippines the PKP moved out of illegality, into open agitation and electoral activity. The highpoint of this orientation was the success of the Democratic Alliance in the elections of 1946. The political cost was the role the party played as a restraining influence in day-to-day class struggle.²⁷ The concept of the national democratic revolution was further refined and given credibility for Third World socialists through the experience of the struggle and eventual victory led by Mao Zedong in China.

There are two immediate consequences that flow from the adoption of the national democratic perspective. The first is to reinforce nationalism within the mass movement. The achievement of national liberation (as opposed to formal independence) becomes the first aim of Filipino

²⁵ Known also as the Kuomintang.

²⁶ Charlie Hore, *The Road to Tiananmen Square*, London: Bookmarks, 1991, pp 13-36.

²⁷ A similar story could be told, for instance, about the strategy of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). "What the 'Popular Front' meant in Indonesia was not only 'co-operation' with Indonesian bourgeois nationalists, but the Dutch as well! According to the line every other consideration, including even independence, had to be subordinated to the struggle against fascism." Craig Bowen, *From the Ashes – The*

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

revolutionaries. The second consequence follows logically – if national liberation precedes social revolution, it becomes both necessary and desirable to attempt to involve “progressive” Filipino capitalists (meaning those who would benefit from the development of an import-substitutionist economy) in the struggle.²⁸ Hence, the party’s position on the National United Front, which attempts to bring the national bourgeoisie and progressive sections of the middle class into alliance with the peasants and workers.²⁹

How that impacts on the party’s organising work among workers, especially urban workers, is something that will be addressed in the next chapter.

“THE WORKING MEN HAVE NO COUNTRY”³⁰ – OR DO THEY?

THE CPP from its formation had a choice. It could have opted to place itself outside the framework of nationalism, by presenting itself as an organisation that argued that the problems of workers, peasants and the urban middle class were linked to the nature of class divisions in Philippine society. This would not necessarily have meant narrow parochialism – turning its back on the question of US military bases or the role of multinational capital – but would have involved making the case that the most effective blow against imperialism was to conduct a resolute class struggle domestically.

Instead, it has lent its not inconsiderable weight to developing a nationalist spirit. One element of that effort has been to project back into the history of the archipelago an anachronistic concept of the nation, adding weight to the fallacy (of which more below) that nations are an “eternal” feature of human society. Another has been to develop an unquestioning acceptance of the borders –themselves a product of colonialism – that define the Philippine polity.³¹

Rise and Fall of the PKI. A Short History of the Indonesian Communist Party, London (presumed): Militant International, 1990, p 14.

²⁸ See, for instance, Wigberto E. Tanada, “Is There No Room for Nationalism in the Medium-Term Development Plan?”, *Kasarinlan* 9, nos. 2 and 3, 1993-1994, pp 88-94.

²⁹ Guerrero, *op cit*, pp 160-162.

³⁰ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, New York: Pathfinder, 1973, p 32.

³¹ Sison refuses, for instance, to rule out a Philippine claim on Sabah in northern Borneo, arguing only that “at the moment it is pointless for the Philippine Communist Party to be taking up the claim or to be drumming up the claim”. Similarly, he accepts the legitimacy of Philippine claims to parts of the Spratleys, saying: “That’s reasonable, especially when there’s oil!” Interview, *op cit*.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

Yet before the Spanish, there was no Philippines. People lived primarily in a scattered range of small fishing villages, with minimal communication between population centres. It was a subsistence economy, too poor and underdeveloped, as Constantino points out, to sustain the kind of cultures which elsewhere produced the wonders of Angkor Wat or Borobudur.³² The exception was in the south, which had been impacted by the spread of Islam and which exhibited greater class differentiation. Manila was founded by Muslim traders and, if the Spanish invasion had not interrupted the process, the entire archipelago would more than likely have at some point fallen under Islamic influence.

Thanks to their more productive form of social organisation, the Muslims (today still known as *Moros*, from the Spanish for Moors) had some success in resisting invasion. "Throughout the Spanish occupation, the Muslims were not considered part of the developing society and the Muslim region was treated as foreign territory. Needless to say, the Muslims shared the same attitude."³³ While the archipelago was united politically with US colonisation the cultural and religious divisions have persisted to this day.

Given the different roots and dynamics of Moro nationalism, this study does not attempt to deal further with it. Suffice to say that the existence of a different nationalism within the archipelago helps illustrate the pressure on (Luzon-centred) Filipino nationalism to constantly define and redefine its legitimacy. A nationalism that cannot claim intellectual hegemony over an area congruent with its "own" state has trouble laying claim to being a timeless and universal truth.

The emergence of a Philippine identity begins only after three centuries of colonialism, initially only among the urban elite, and only then with the coming together of two sets of circumstances – the dismissive way in which the Spanish metropolis treated the economic, political and cultural rights of the "native-born" Spaniards (Filipinos) and the birth of modern nationalist sentiment in Europe in the nineteenth century.

Ben Anderson in his *Imagined Communities*³⁴ shows how a combination of metropolitan snobbery towards the colonialists, the emergence of competing economic priorities, and, crucially, a sense of local, homogenised (ruling class) culture sets up a dynamic for the creation of

³² Renato Constantino, *Neocolonial Identity and Counter-Consciousness: Essays on Cultural Decolonization*, London: Merlin Press, 1978, p 26.

³³ Ibid, p 28.

³⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1991.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

a nationalism at odds with that of the distant capital. Rizal gives an indication of such a process at work, summing up the frustration of those born of Spanish descent in the Philippines thus:

... In the Philippines all those are *filibusteros* (subversives) in the towns who do not take off their hats on meeting a Spaniard, be the weather that it may; those who greet a friar and do not kiss his sweaty hand, if he is a priest, or his habit, if he is a lay-brother ... those who are subscribers to some periodical of Spain or of Europe, even if treat of literature, the sciences, or the fine arts ...³⁵

There was, of course, as noted above no shortage of resistance to the Spanish and their friars from those at the bottom of Philippines society. But popular revolts were driven by much more immediate, practical concerns such as land ownership, the frequency of use of the landlord's whip, or the viciousness of the friars' demands for unpaid labour. Attempts to weld a "national liberation" element on to such localised uprisings are a concession to romanticism. The point at issue is that the notion of national identity emerged from the top down. As Renato Constantino writes:

From a term with narrow racial and elitist connotation (only for Spaniards born in the Philippines), Filipino began to include Chinese *mestizos* and urbanised natives ... Later, through their propaganda work, the *ilustrados* ... wrested the term Filipino from the *creoles* and infused it with national meaning to finally include the entire people. Thus the term Filipino which had begun as concept with narrow racial application and later developed to delineate an elite group characterised by wealth, education and Spanish culture finally embraced the entire nation and became a means of national identification.³⁶

The debate on the general nature of nationalism is long-standing, and the body of literature vast. This is not the place to attempt a systematic overview of the question. But if the discussion of the CPP's nationalism is to be placed in a useful context, some defence needs to be made here of the classical Marxist precept on which my argument is based – namely that nationalism, a concept of nation, and a national identity, emerged as a modern construct, linked to capitalist development.

³⁵ Quoted in Constantino, *Neocolonial Identity*, op cit, pp 33-34.

³⁶ Renato Constantino, *Identity and Consciousness: The Philippine Experience*, Quezon City: No publisher, 1989, p 25. Note how Constantino takes terms like the Philippines and the nation for granted, even while explaining that no such places had existed previously.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

Nationalism is not a free-floating, eternal idea as is commonly understood. In Europe, an embryonic sense of national identity and “nation” took on organisational form as emerging industrial capital demanded a stable, defined home market, and a state apparatus capable of defending (and extending) it. The nation states that followed were, as often as not, welded together in response to, and in opposition to, the first created. Germany was “united” (it had, of course, never existed as such beforehand) in the nineteenth century in order to compete with Britain and France; Italy likewise.

The material basis of the nation state was dispersed as European powers set out to expand their markets globally. As Karl Marx and Frederick Engels put it: “The bourgeoisie ... compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.”³⁷ Thus, in what became the colonies, members of the expatriate and local elite, grouped around the nodal points created by colonialism, fought for the right to exploit the local direct producers on their account; that in turn required state formations.

But if the development of the nation state was founded on rivalry over access to markets, control of production and of land, it also demanded mechanisms for the integration of the domestic population. Thus national languages were often developed by national movements or states, rather than the other way round.³⁸ National histories were written that projected the new identity back into an era (sometimes a very recent one) where such terms would have been meaningless.

The British Marxist Chris Harman summarises the difference between pre-capitalist states and the successors thus:

The class societies that existed before the rise of capitalism were organised through states. But these states were external to most of the activities of the great mass of people ... In such a society the situation which existed in the twelfth-century monarchy

³⁷ Marx and Engels, op cit, p 20.

³⁸ The Indonesian language, based on Malay and called Malay until 1928, gained impetus through its use by the Dutch administration and by the advance of capitalism (it was a traders’ *lingua franca*). The nationalist movement officially embraced it as the proposed national language in 1928. It then was further constructed by the nationalists and later also by the national state. I am grateful to Tom O’Lincoln for this point.

called England (in fact made up of modern England, much of western France and parts of Wales, Ireland and Scotland) was typical, with the military rulers using one language (Norman French), the literate elite of administrators using another (medieval Latin), and the mass of the population using a variety of disparate dialects (various forms of Anglo-Saxon, French, Welsh and Gaelic).

The state in such a society might be centralised and powerful or weak and fragmented. But in neither case was it a national state as we understand it today. Whatever else its subjects thought, they did not think of themselves as citizens speaking a common language or owing an undivided loyalty to a single geographic entity.³⁹

An indication of the way in which nationalism had to be “constructed” even within Europe was a remark from c’Azeglio, who put it this way: “We have made Italy: now we must make Italians.”⁴⁰ Eric Hobsbawm notes a similar need for a campaign for Swiss nationalism alongside the formation of the modern federal state last century:

Existing customary traditional practices – folksong, physical contests, marksmanship – were modified, ritualized and institutionalized for the new national purposes. Traditional folksongs were supplemented by new songs in the same idiom, often composed by schoolmasters, transferred to a choral repertoire whose content was patriotic-progressive ...⁴¹

In the Philippine setting it is quite clear that a “community” began to emerge only in the late nineteenth century, and to all intents and purposes had to be imposed subsequently on the population of the archipelago. In the same way that the Indonesian “nation” was welded together by a national liberation struggle from the ensemble of former Dutch colonies in the region, the future Philippines was brought together by colonialism, not by any section of its original population.

In the Philippines the emergence of a Filipino ruling class was thus neither planned nor accidental. It was a result of the molecular development of a locally based elite. That elite, as it

³⁹ Chris Harman, “The Return of the National Question”, *Marxism and the New Imperialism*, London: Bookmarks, 1994, pp 188-189.

⁴⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914”, *The Invention of Tradition*, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p 267.

⁴¹ Eric Hobsbawm, “Inventing Traditions”, *ibid*, p 6.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

gradually became conscious of itself and its particular interests, set out to foster a mutually acceptable ideology that justified first criticism, then rebellion, against the metropolitan power. Within that framework, it is possible to see how the nation can be both an “imagined” community and a real one, based on material foundations.

It also has to be noted that sub-fractions of the ruling class had varying economic and therefore varying political interests and objectives. “The sugar planters of the Western Visayas, for example, became citizens of the world market in the 1860s but did not become citizens of the Philippine Republic until 1946 – a difference of nearly a century that left them with strong anti-national economic interests and close political ties to their premier sugar customer, the United States.”⁴²

Philippine nationalism could exhibit enormous flexibility, becoming a pillar of the status quo as much as a weapon of dissent. It encompassed the transition to a Philippine Commonwealth in 1935, with a view to eventual independence. This move opened up a space for an officially sanctioned development of nationalism, a modest version that was an adjunct to a loyal relationship to Washington, rather than its polar opposite. By contrast, popular resistance was dealt with harshly, as with the repression of the Sakdalista uprising in 1935.

Given the accommodating nature of official nationalism, it was not completely surprising that some nationalists could participate quite happily with their new masters, the Japanese, after 1941. With Japan pursuing a policy of encouraging a pro-Asian popular sentiment, aspects of Filipino nationalism were cautiously tolerated. It was during this period that Filipino gained a substantial boost as the national language. Meanwhile, as noted in Chapter One, left-wing nationalists, including the PKP, collaborated with the US in its drive to reconquer the archipelago, hoping that the US would be fair and reasonable in its treatment of Filipinos’ aspiration for independence. When the US formally conceded sovereignty to the new Republic of the Philippines it hedged such “liberation” with a series of restrictions that bent the Philippine economy to the needs of the American. This in turn led to a series of campaigns around official nationalism. Senator Claro Mayo Recto launched his nationalist crusade in opposition to the flagrantly pro-US policies of President Ramon Magsaysay, who took office in 1953. Carlos P. Garcia won the presidential election of 1957 with a slogan of “Filipino First”.

⁴² A. McCoy, “Introduction: The Social History of an Archipelago”, *Philippine Social History, Global Trade and Local Transformations*, A. McCoy, & E. de Jesus, eds., Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1982, p12, quoted in Weekley, p 54.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

If further evidence was needed that nationalist language is a flexible creature, it could be found in the writings of Ferdinand Marcos, the president who combined some of the most whole-hearted collaboration with the US's strategic aims in the western Pacific and Southeast Asia with a rhetoric based on general nationalist aspirations⁴³ – while at the same time, of course, conducting the most vicious repression of the national democratic Left, and of the CPP in particular.

The conclusion to be drawn from this brief overview of the development of Filipino nationalism is that the concept has fitted remarkably snugly at most times as the dominant ideology across the political spectrum. Today, nationalism continues to be the main vehicle for both the defence and the criticism of prevailing society. It embraces everyone from the far Right to the Left. Crucially for this work, it also encompasses the CPP.

TWO SISIONS VERSUS TWO LENINS

FOR MOST supporters and opponents of the party alike, its role as vigorous exponent of militant nationalism is further evidence of its Marxist-Leninist credentials. This is, in fact, not so. Its adherence to nationalism is, as I have argued, on the contrary, evidence of a *break* with the Marxist tradition.⁴⁴ One of the factors that obscures that break, and allows Sison and the party to claim the mantle of orthodoxy, is that there were two distinct positions put forward at different times by Lenin on the question of national democratic revolution.

1) Lenin versus the Marxist-Leninists

BEFORE MOVING on to examine that point, it is useful to clarify Lenin's position on nationalism and the national question. This was a practical question for anyone faced with the challenge of making revolution in an empire, Russia's, known justifiably as the "prison house of nations". Lenin argued that modern nationalism was a bourgeois phenomenon, related to capitalists' needs for a secure home market and a state machine to provide defence against competitors. Nationalism in the colonial nations was therefore simultaneously an expression of

⁴³ Ferdinand E. Marcos, *Today's Revolution: Democracy*, Manila: By the author, 1971, pp 104-106.

⁴⁴ For a brief history of the development of Marxist thought on nationalism, see Chris Harman, "The Return of the National Question", *op cit*, and Nigel Harris, *National Liberation*, London: Penguin, 1992.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

opposition to an oppression felt by the entire population, and an attempt by an incipient ruling class to assert its power.

Lenin understood that Marxists could not be indifferent to national oppression, but had to oppose it in all its forms. Marxists in oppressed nations had to attempt to win the working class to playing a leading role in the fight against national oppression. Marxists in oppressor nations had to oppose every manifestation of chauvinism in order to demonstrate that the workers there were the allies of the oppressed. Defence of national rights was therefore a tactical question, subordinated to the aim of winning cross-border working class unity.⁴⁵ What this meant, as he argued in 1913, was:

To throw off the feudal yoke, all national oppression and all privileges enjoyed by any particular nation or language, is the imperative duty of the proletariat as a democratic force, and is certainly in the interests of the proletarian struggle which is obscured and retarded by bickering on the national question. But to go *beyond* these strictly limited and definite historical limits in helping bourgeois nationalism means betraying the proletariat and siding with the bourgeoisie ... Combat all national oppression? Yes, of course! Fight *for* any kind of national development, *for* "national culture" in general? Of course not!⁴⁶

There is clearly a gap between Lenin's position and the CPP's. With the dubious exception of Sison's comments, I have come across no evidence in written or oral form that show that the CPP is or ever has been committed to opposition to nationalism in the sense that Lenin might have understood. Sison's statements criticising nationalism clash with the day-to-day slogans put forward by party members, and they also do not sit easily with party and party-influenced publications. They indicate an awareness of Lenin's writings, but do nothing to undermine the CPP's image as a nationalist organisation.

2) Everything changes in April

LENIN ARGUED for a two-stage, national democratic framework for revolution up until March 1917. Then, returning from exile to Russia in April, he shocked his supporters, circulating the

⁴⁵ For a full exposition of the argument, see V. I. Lenin, *The Right of Nations to Self-Determination*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976.

⁴⁶ V. I. Lenin, *Critical Remarks on the National Question*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1976, pp 23-24. Emphases in the original.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION - THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

April Theses in which he argued for the possibility, the desirability and the necessity of moving to socialist revolution, even though Russia was still a relatively backward country dominated by the peasantry. The shift was a watershed in Marxist thinking, and led to a debate that raged for some six weeks within the Bolshevik Party.⁴⁷ Lenin's position was accepted.⁴⁸

Lenin's pre-1917 position reflected the then Marxist orthodoxy. Following Marx himself, and later the leading German Marxist Karl Kautsky, it was widely accepted that capitalism had to develop in any given nation state to the degree capable of both creating a large working class and the material wherewithal for abolishing want and privation before a fight for socialism was possible. In the conditions of Czarist Russia, with only relatively small pockets of advanced industry in some cities, that was interpreted by both the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions of the Marxist movement alike as meaning that socialist revolution was not on the immediate agenda.⁴⁹

The Bolsheviks argued that the coming Russian Revolution would be a national democratic one, achieving the overthrow of the aristocracy and remaining feudal relations on the land and opening the way for full-blown industrial development. This revolution would be led by the working class, given the weak and vacillating nature of the Russian capitalists, who were more afraid of their workers than of the Czar, but would lay the basis for a bourgeois democratic state. The working class would withdraw into "opposition" and resume the class struggle on the new, and increasingly favourable, terrain.

This is the Lenin that Sison and others in the Stalinist tradition look to for legitimacy. But in April 1917, Lenin junked his own arguments and instead put forward the position that due to the interlinked nature of global capitalist development, a socialist revolution in Russia could succeed on the basis of a number of pre-conditions.

The first was the revolution had to spread to countries such as Germany where the working class was much larger, and the material resources available after the revolution would be much greater.

⁴⁷ The theses are contained within a larger work, V. I. Lenin, "On the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Present Revolution", *Selected Works*, Vol. II, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1951. Six weeks may not sound like much, but in the context of an unfolding revolutionary situation, it was a substantial period.

⁴⁸ For an account of this process see Tony Cliff, *Lenin: Volume Two, All Power to the Soviets*, London: Pluto, 1976, pp 97-139.

⁴⁹ Leon Trotsky independently developed his theory of Permanent Revolution, which allowed for socialist revolution in backward Russia, after the 1905 Russian Revolution. Lenin's post-April 1917 position was essentially the same as Trotsky's, but it seems that Lenin came to his conclusions without being aware of Trotsky's earlier work. See Tony Cliff, *Trotsky: Towards October 1879-1917*, London: Bookmarks, 1989, pp 133-134.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

The second was that the working class in Russia had to pull the numerically much larger peasantry in behind them in an alliance. Such an alliance would be led by the workers, who would cement it by legalising the peasants' land seizures. The theory was put to the test and found to be successful in the October Revolution of 1917, which transferred power to the Soviets (workers' councils).⁵⁰

Sison dismisses the arguments in the *April Theses* as "something specific to Russia", which "had an industrial base – though that industrial base was surrounded by an ocean of feudalism and mediaevalism".⁵¹ But while the later Lenin is rejected, it should be noted that Sison does not simply echo the early Lenin either. So he argues:

Now Lenin was indeed the one who developed fully the two-stage theory, the two tactics of social democracy, although the grain of that is already Marx ... By my harking back to Marx, I would like to stress the point: that when the proletariat has gained power, it can solve the peasant problem. When the proletariat is in the position to solve the land problem, you can get on with the socialist revolution.

... You see, upon the seizure of political power, the national democratic revolution is *basically* completed. Upon that basic completion, or upon establishment of the people's democratic regime with the proletarian dictatorship, or the like expression used in Mao's literature, the proletarian leadership, then the socialist revolution can commence.

So there are actually two requirements. One is the proletarian dictatorship or class leadership in people's democracy, or in the basically completed national democratic revolution, which leads to the second point. You can socialise the means of production and release the forces of production and start building the industrial foundation and socialising and mechanising if you wish as soon as possible.⁵²

There are, as has been shown, two Lenins. But there are also two Sisons, one who is familiar with some orthodox Marxist theory and history, and another who takes his starting point as the need to develop the Philippine economy. Where Lenin understood the two stages of the revolution as

⁵⁰ See "On the Tasks of the Proletariat", op cit. The subsequent decline and defeat of the revolution does not concern us here. For a concise explanation of the process, see Peter Binns, Tony Cliff, Chris Harman, *Russia: From Workers' State to State Capitalism*, London: Bookmarks, 1987.

⁵¹ Interview, op cit.

⁵² Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

essentially distinct, Sison (following on from Mao Zedong) blurs the distinction. As the quotation above illustrates, unlike Lenin, Sison argues for the national democratic revolution on the basis that the working class will supplant the bourgeoisie in directing the process of capitalist development. Yet socialist revolution is ruled off the immediate agenda in the Philippines precisely because, in Sison's terms, it lacks basic industries (and therefore a critical mass of working class population). This conundrum can only be solved by regarding the CPP as a legitimate substitute for the (supposedly meagre) working class. This position leads in practice to the subordination of working class interests, as shall be discussed in the next chapter.

Meanwhile, the unquestioning adoption of a national democratic, stageist theory underpins the CPP's strategy of national democratic revolution and class collaboration. It also imports nationalism, interpreted as the liberation and development of the nation state, into the heart of CPP politics.

3) The Asian alternative

WAS IT the case that the CPP's founders had to choose between an "Asian" (i.e., Chinese) model or a "Eurocentric" one – with national democratic revolution the aim in either eventuality? The answer is no. Some argue that, in the Asian context, the concept of workers' revolution is no more than a Eurocentric imposition. This misses an important point. Marxism may have developed in Europe because that was the continent with the first capitalist working class. But the kernel of Marxism – that class struggle between workers and employers emerges over the division of the surplus value generated in production – is an objective truth, not a culturally determined view. Workers in Asia moved into struggle before they read Marx, just as their European brothers and sisters did before them.

There is a history, albeit largely submerged, of an alternative tradition among East and South-East Asian revolutionaries. This approach, which attempted to reconcile the struggle against imperialism with that against local capitalism, based itself on Lenin's latterday arguments, which were paralleled by Leon Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution. But it was not a simple result of a transfer of ideas – it also flowed directly from the experience of workers themselves.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

In the Chinese revolution of 1925-27, for example, millions of workers took strike action, occupied their workplaces and began – in the Guangdong region and Hong Kong – to organise production in a vein similar to the original Russian workers' councils. As Jean Chesneaux writes:

Central control was maintained not only by a strike committee consisting of thirteen persons, but also by a "Strikers Delegate Congress" comprising over 800 delegates (one for every 50 strikers), which was a kind of workers' parliament. It met three times a week, thus ensuring constant contact with the rank and file ... The responsibilities of the strike committee went far beyond the normal field of activities dealing with a work stoppage. During the summer of 1925 the committee became, in fact, a kind of workers' government – and indeed the name applied to it by both its friends and its enemies was "Government No 2" ... The committee had at its disposal an armed force of several thousand men.⁵³

That kind of fighting spirit and alternative forms of organising politically and economically existed elsewhere in China to varying degrees over the two years that followed. The workers' struggle (as in Russia) was accompanied by peasant land seizures and attacks on the landlords. It took a combination of advice from the Stalinised Comintern that the CCP should co-operate with the nationalists, and extremely brutal suppression of the workers' and peasants' movement by those same nationalists and competing warlords, to derail the possibility of socialist revolution in China.⁵⁴

An alternative based on similar politics also surfaced in Vietnam from 1931 onwards, with the formation of a Trotskyist group, Dong Duong Cong San (Indochinese Communism). In contrast to the Stalinist-influenced Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), with its emphasis on a patriotic approach to unite all classes against colonialism,⁵⁵ it argued in 1932:

Our Party⁵⁶ has been repressed to the point of being completely destroyed by white terror. We have to change our policy. We ought to abandon the motto "Dictatorship of the Proletariat and Peasantry".⁵⁷ We ought to show the Party members that the

⁵³ Jean Chesneaux, *The Chinese Labour Movement 1919-1927*, California: Stanford University Press, 1968, p 157, quoted in Hore, op cit, p 21.

⁵⁴ Hore, op cit, pp 13-36.

⁵⁵ Khanh, op cit, p 26.

⁵⁶ The reference was to the ICP, of which the Trotskyists at this stage regarded themselves as an "external faction".

⁵⁷ This was the slogan of the pre-March 1917 Lenin.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

revolutionary force of the workers is more powerful than that of the peasants, using as example the militant force of the workers of Canton in 1927. Only the workers can practice the theory of Karl Marx.⁵⁸

With the short-term success of the August Revolution of 1945, rolling urban insurrections placed the ICP in a position to declare national liberation. The party dissolved itself, declaring its readiness: "To demonstrate that the members of the Communist party are the vanguard fighters of the nation, ready to put the interests of the nation above class interests and to sacrifice partisan interests for the sake of the common interests of the Nation."⁵⁹ As British and French troops moved to snuff out the liberation movement, the ICP leadership announced its willingness to treat with them. By contrast, the Trotskyists called for armed resistance.⁶⁰

The point here is not to conduct an extensive survey of Asian revolutionary movements, but to underline that there was always an alternative to the Stalinist theory and practice inherited by the CPP. The ideas of the "second" Lenin were not applicable only to Russia or Europe, but in the actions of the Chinese workers, and the attempts at organising by Vietnamese revolutionary socialists, were given a concrete, Asian history and grounding.

NATIONALISM ON A PEDESTAL

CONSEQUENCES FLOW from the reinforcement by the CPP of nationalism and class collaboration in the name of national liberation. If, as Sison put it: "The basic contradictions in Philippine society are those between the Filipino nation and imperialism, and those between the great masses of the people and feudalism,"⁶¹ then there is every reason to try to unite all those who do not gain heavily from intimate links with multinationals and the world market – hence the concept of the national bourgeoisie, and of the alliance between all progressive classes.

From slogans on banners at legal demonstrations to the conscious attempts to revive or create a nationalist popular culture, the party or its above-ground supporters paint themselves as the best

⁵⁸ Khanh, op cit, p 197.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p 328.

⁶⁰ Simon Pirani, "1945: Vietnam's August Revolution", *Vietnam and Trotskyism*, Sydney: Communist League, 1987, p 39. See also Jonathan Neale, *The American War: Vietnam 1960-1975*, London: Bookmarks, 2001, pp 22-24.

⁶¹ Guerrero, op cit, p 129.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

and most committed nationalists. This has its advantages in making it easier to win influential and financially comfortable friends among the middle class, but it has its disadvantages, too.⁶²

Nationalism is, by definition, an ambiguous phenomenon, which can be pressed into service by any manner of politician or party. It obscures the class divisions in society, and means that for the party, the solidity of its adherents' politics can be questionable. CPP-controlled areas, where support has been won largely on the basis of nationalist slogans and promises of land reform, can prove fragile. For example, as Walden Bello notes, a majority living in NPA-controlled areas in Isabela and Cagayan voted for Eduardo Cojuangco and Imelda Marcos in the 1992 presidential elections.⁶³

I argue that the Philippines is an independent nation, albeit constrained by economic and political weaknesses and subject to external influence by major powers because of its lowly placing in the "pecking order" of international relations. Certainly, Marxists in the Philippines have had an urgent need and duty to mobilise against, for example, a US military presence. But so, too, do Marxists in Australia in the light of US satellite tracking bases here. Yet opposition to imperialism need not be the same as support for nationalism, a support which blurs the class divisions in the Philippines itself.

The CPP's analysis by contrast is not only questionable, but misorients Philippine revolutionaries, compounding the problems outlined in Chapter Two. For the CPP, support for nationalism is not a tactic but a strategy.⁶⁴ Achieving national political and economic independence on a bourgeois democratic basis is the party's acknowledged goal. Marxism is touted not as a clear alternative world view to nationalism, but as its most dedicated supporter.

The point is central to this thesis. Nationalism's ambiguity allows Philippine communism to move between its radical variant, guerillaism, and its "respectable" electoral variant. On the one hand, party members can lead the peasantry in armed struggle for "national liberation". On the other, nationalism and the national democratic strategy feeds into alliances with middle and

⁶² Even anti-communist propaganda can work in the party's favour by pushing nationalists into its lap. "The assertion of nationalism is regarded as anti-Americanism, and anti-Americanism is equated with subversion. Critics, dissenters and anti-imperialists are immediately identified as communists." "Colonial Legacies", *Graphic*, September 27, 1972, quoted in Renato Constantino, *History: Myths and Reality*, Quezon City: Karrel, no date, p 122.

⁶³ Walden Bello, "The Crisis of the Philippine Progressive Movement: A Preliminary Investigation", *Debate* 4, 1992, p 48.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Jose Maria Sison with Rainer Werning, *The Philippine Revolution: The Leader's View*, New York: Crane Russak, 1989, p 172.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONAL LIBERATION – THE IMPOSSIBLE DREAM?

upper-class figures and groupings – alliances that lend themselves to mainstream or electoral activity.

Furthermore, the party's analysis presupposes that whatever frictions may exist between Filipino employers and workers, these are lessened by the greater frictions between the emergent Philippine nation and imperialism, especially the US. I explore the consequences of such a position in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

INTRODUCTION

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e. capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed – a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital ...

The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association. The development of Modern Industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers.¹

AT THE core of Karl Marx's work lie two interconnected propositions – that capitalism is a system endemically prone to crisis, and that the working class is the only section of society with both the interest and ability to bring that system to an end, by majoritarian revolution. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, that understanding was the platform on which generations of socialists based their work. It explained the long-term nexus between the construction of socialist and trade union organisation and the overwhelmingly urban nature of most Marxist groups. Yet the CPP, in common with a number of revolutionary parties in the developing world which claim the mantle of Marxism, has looked elsewhere – to the countryside and the peasantry – for the main forces of its struggle.

Sison has summarised how he understands the relationship between the two classes:

¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, New York: Pathfinder, 1973, p 22 and p 27.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

The working class is the most progressive productive and political force in the Philippines ... Being a minority class in Philippine society, the working class can muster a bigger force by forming a basic alliance with the peasantry. The working class and the peasantry are the basic exploited classes in Philippine society and compose at least 90 percent of the people.

But how is the basic alliance realised? It is by deploying and developing CPP cadres and members in the countryside to build the New People's Army, the peasant and other mass organizations, and the organs of political power.²

In the light of the divergence between these two understandings, this chapter aims to do three things: to compare the classical Marxist and Stalinist conceptions of the role of the working class and put the CPP's theoretical understanding in a historical context; to examine the composition, record and potential of the Philippine working class; and to begin to consider how the CPP's theoretical position might clash with the practice of class struggle.

A survey of Sison's work shows effectively no shift over time in his views on the role and nature of the working class. While he has been tactically flexible, his strategy has remained constant. Others in the party have placed greater emphasis on organising among workers. Yet all too often, those who have dissented on this point have also tended to move in the direction of the kind of legal and urban work that the leadership can easily dismiss as mere reformism. This experience will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven.

Why is it so important to show the extent to which Sison's Marxism has diverged from classical Marxism? Doing so strengthens my thesis that the CPP's abandonment of the working class as its strategic focus reinforces its reliance on the peasantry and urban middle-class forces; thereby underpins the vacillation, typical of Philippine communism over 70 years, between guerillaism and parliamentarism; and means that the party has failed to capitalise politically on major outbursts of working-class struggle.

² Jose Maria Sison with Rainer Werning, *The Philippine Revolution: The Leader's View*, New York: Crane Russak, 1989, p 52.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

WORKERS OF THE WORLD DISAPPEAR?

ONCE AGAIN, we need to turn to the experience of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to understand the CPP's later development. The CCP's history includes two quite distinct periods, each of which is marked by a difference in social composition among its membership. Until the defeat of the 1925-27 revolution, a clear majority of CCP activists were urban working-class, in keeping with the Bolshevik tradition which had inspired the party's foundation and reflecting the rapid pace of industrialisation in some of the major coastal cities.

It was this membership that participated and attempted to lead the mass strikes that first broke out in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hong Kong from May 1925. CCP membership mushroomed from a few thousand in 1926 to more than 30,000 by early 1927.³ This went side by side with a gigantic growth of the workers' movement. As Jean Chesneaux notes:

The unions of Hubei and Hunan were, in fact, becoming a "workers' government" to an even greater extent than those of Guangzhou had been during the Hong Kong strike and boycott. They controlled large funds obtained not only from dues ... but also from contributions paid after successful settlement of a wage dispute ... They also had armed and carefully trained bands of pickets ...⁴

The final defeat of the revolution, in December 1927, broke the back of the party. It continued only as a relatively small band in the countryside, where a largely urban student leadership (including Mao Zedong) led bands of peasants. Its survival was as much thanks to the total chaos prevailing in China and the breakdown of centralised, nationwide authority as to its politics or resources. The rupture with the organised working class – with the living reality of class struggle in the factories, wharves and warehouses – was complete. A November 1928 party circular admitted:

Unfortunately, our union organisations have been reduced to a minimum, our party units in the cities have been pulverised and isolated. Nowhere in China can we find one solid industrial cell.⁵

³ Charlie Hore, *The Road to Tiananmen Square*, London: Bookmarks, 1991, p 25.

⁴ Jean Cheneaux, *The Chinese Labour Movement 1919-1927*, California: Stanford University Press, 1968, p 325, quoted in *ibid*, pp 25-26.

⁵ Benjamin Schwartz, *Chinese Communism and the Rise of Mao*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979, p 40, quoted in *ibid*, p 33.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

This was not merely a setback of huge proportions, it changed the very character of the CCP. As Leon Trotsky noted on October 4, 1928:

[W]e learn that while the CCP has gained (for how long?) tens of thousands of new members among the peasants, it has on the other hand lost the majority of its workers ... This fact [peasant recruitment] is important as a precursory sign of the great possibilities in the future. But in the period under consideration it is only one form of the dissolution and the liquidation of the CCP, for, by losing its proletarian nucleus, it ceases to be in conformity with its historical destination.⁶

If the Marxist vanguard was reduced to students leading peasants, then workers' revolution, as had occurred in Russia in October 1917, was off the agenda. From this physical disjuncture flowed a number of political propositions from Mao which echo on 50 years or more later in Sison's writings – that power in the cities has to be seized from outside, from the countryside; that the peasantry forms the backbone of the movement; that the working class becomes a symbolic force, represented as the ideas present in the heads of a handful of formerly urban (mainly student) cadres; that the peasants have to be prevented from prematurely dispossessing the landlord class for fear of bringing their wrath down on the vulnerable Red Army; that "national development" rather than socialism is the political glue which holds the entire cross-class alliance together.

The Maoist analysis was not challenged by the rest of the world communist movement.⁷ On the contrary, as we saw in the previous chapter, the aim of national democratic revolution in the colonial world had become the orthodoxy of the Stalinising parties. The analysis appeared to be triumphantly vindicated with the seizure of state power by the CCP in 1949. Few noticed the almost total absence of participation by workers in the Red Army's victory, and the absence of the organs of workers' power that had characterised the Russian revolutions and the 1925-27 uprising in China itself.

This was the tradition handed down to and enthusiastically embraced by Sison. As he put it in *Philippine Society and Revolution*:

⁶ Leon Trotsky, "The Chinese Question after the Sixth Congress", *Leon Trotsky on China*, New York: Monad Press, 1978, p 347.

⁷ The exception was the small international grouping of Marxists aligned with Leon Trotsky.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

The most significant development so far in the Philippine Revolution is the reestablishment of the Communist Party of the Philippines under the supreme guidance of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought ... the acme of proletarian revolutionary ideology in the present era ...⁸

The use of the term “proletarian” is instructive.⁹ Marx used the term to describe that section of the population that does not have (or has lost) control of the means of production and that therefore has to sell its ability to labour (its labour power) in order to survive. In the process of doing so, workers are forced to work collectively with others, sometimes very many others, who find themselves in the same situation. Whereas under previous class societies, the extraction of surplus from serfs or slaves was open and combined with physical coercion, workers under capitalism are “free” to sell their labour value at the highest available price. However high that price, the employer will always skim off that portion of the product not needed to pay the worker to ensure his or her survival. Thus exploitation is built into the system – workers are not slaves, but “wage slaves”.¹⁰

I want to argue that the tradition to which Sison and the CPP adhere has reduced the proletariat from a concrete, living category of human beings, bound together by a mutual relationship to the means of production, to a cypher, a symbol around which other class forces organise.

It is perhaps instructive to note the difficulty which Sison suffered in answering the simplest of questions about the nature of the working class in the interview given to this author in Utrecht. It took no less than four attempts to focus him on the question. His answer, stripped of tangential points, came down to:

⁸ Amado Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution, Specific Characteristics of Our People's War, and Our Urgent Task[s]*, Oakland: International Association of Filipino Patriots, 1979, p 60.

⁹ According to Hal Draper, the term proletarian was used from the 2nd to the 19th century to encompass everyone in the lowest, poorest stratum of society, essentially paupers. It was only after the French revolution of 1830 that the term began to move into use in its narrower, modern, sense of working class wage-earner. *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution: Volume I – State and Bureaucracy*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977, pp 131-132.

¹⁰ For a very useful summary of Marx's theory, see Chris Harman, *Economics of the Madhouse: Capitalism and the Market Today*, London: Bookmarks, 1995.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

The working class is still the most productive and most progressive class ... If I may now –the proletariat. It is the class with its theory of Marxism-Leninism, with a rich experience of great successes as well as great failures.¹¹

But this seems at best descriptive, at worst circular. What is missing is the anchorage of the concept of the proletariat within the social relations of production. In Sison's hands the term "working class" seems to become a label laden with moral overtones, rather than an analytical tool. It is probably no coincidence that his attempted answer flows into a further point about the crisis in the Soviet Union:

A descent, a completion of the process of sabotage by the modern revisionists since 1956. Which has been masquerading as socialism, modern revisionism has temporarily brought disgrace to the word socialism and an embarrassment to those who have gotten themselves confused about the difference between scientific socialism and modern revisionism and got carried away by the exceedingly strong power of the high tech media.¹²

The reference to 1956 – the year of President Nikita Krushchev's "secret speech" to the 20th congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) – is significant. For Sison, as for Mao, the decline of the USSR began with the move away from the legacy of Stalin, who died in 1953. Yet Stalin's period in power was marked by a complete subjection of the working class in the USSR, and the harshest possible gap between the daily experience of working-class people, which was one of super-exploitation and complete absence of political rights, and the privileges and power of the party that ruled ostensibly in its name.

This is not the place to review the extensive arguments about the degeneration of the Russian revolution of October 1917. It is sufficient in this context to point out that the working class did not rally to the defence of the USSR in 1991, and that the collapse of the leading role of the CPSU was met with widespread approval. The regime that ended in 1991 had presided over a situation in which the term proletarian had become completely and systematically detached from its material origins. "Proletarian democracy" meant the rule of the party bureaucracy, "proletarian internationalism" meant foreign communist parties placing the priorities of the CPSU before their own, "proletarian thought" meant the ruling party's propaganda. Although

¹¹ Interview with author, Utrecht, July 8, 1993.

¹² Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

Sison, following Mao, found fault with the USSR following 1956, this separation between working-class experience and ruling-class ideology had long since been in place, and was inherited by the CCP and CPP.

If the removal of the working class as living actors in the struggle to transform the world was one factor running parallel with the rise of Stalin's bureaucracy to power, another was a rewriting of Lenin's understanding of how the working class could unite with the peasantry in a developing country, such as Russia in 1917.

Lenin argued that in a country where the peasantry was numerically dominant, the working class could not take power without support from the countryside, and that therefore there needed to be an alliance. The alliance was not to be realised, by and large, by Bolshevik members organising in the countryside, but by their organising among urban workers and encouraging them to take power directly into their own hands. The alliance would then consist of the urban proletariat taking power and then saying to the peasantry – we, the government in the cities, give you our blessing for you to seize the land and redistribute it among yourselves. This was not to be an alliance of equals. The workers would be far fewer in number, but because of their hold of state power in the urban centres, it would be they who dominated politically.

Writing shortly before the October revolution, Lenin argued:

At the present time the national and agrarian questions are fundamental questions for the petty-bourgeois [i.e. peasant] sections of the population of Russia. And on both these questions the proletariat ... *alone* is capable of pursuing such a determined, genuinely "revolutionary-democratic" policy on both questions which would immediately ensure the proletarian state power not only the support of the majority of the population, but also a real outburst of revolutionary enthusiasm among the people. This is because, for the first time, the people ... would receive warm sympathy proved by deeds, immediate and revolutionary measures against the landowners ...¹³

Sison puts forward two arguments why Lenin's position does not apply in the Philippines. The first is that Russia was more developed.

¹³ V. I. Lenin, *Can the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?*, Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1971, p 13, emphasis in the original.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

[In Russia] there was real tough competition between the industrial bourgeoisie, using its retinue of petit bourgeois intellectuals and politicians like the Mensheviks, the Cadets and so on and so forth, and the proletariat on the other hand, the proletariat led by the Bolsheviks. Russia had basic industries, the Philippines does not have.

What we have in the Philippines is a comprador big bourgeoisie, that has been the case in the development of semifeudalism. The semifeudalism in the Philippines still continues. The US imperialism and monopoly capitalism as a whole merely made a quantitative decrease of the peasantry from something like more than 90 per cent at the end of the 19th century, and now you have something like 70 [per cent], or a bit more, 75 per cent of the population.¹⁴

I will come back to the relative weight of the peasantry and the working class in the Philippines below. But it is instructive to note in passing that Sison recognises that 25 to 30 per cent of the population is outside the peasantry. Elsewhere his political instincts lead him to play down even more savagely the size and weight of the non-peasant classes. As already noted in Chapter Two, for instance, Sison argued in a lecture given at the University of the Philippines, Diliman campus, on April 18, 1986, that there were “four peasants for every industrial worker” – a figure that came from counting agricultural workers as peasants and leaving service workers out the calculation altogether.¹⁵

A lot depends on which end of the telescope is used to view Philippine class composition. As I shall show below, there is another, quite contrary, interpretation of class density in industry. Sison’s argument that the working class is a minority in Philippine society (which is unchallengeable) is, however, not enough. It is workers’ relative weight within the economy that counts. In Russia in 1917, according to Leon Trotsky’s generous estimate, the working class (urban and rural) numbered ten million, 25 million including their families, out of 150 million. Alongside the nobility, the bourgeoisie, and the urban petit-bourgeoisie, the peasantry would have still made up some 75 per cent of the population.¹⁶ Yet October 1917 saw socialist revolution.

¹⁴ Interview, op cit.

¹⁵ Jose Maria Sison, “Crisis of the Semifeudal Economy”, *Philippine Crisis and Revolution*, roneoed, no publication details, p 2.

¹⁶ Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, London: Pluto Press, 1977, p 34.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

While it is true that Russia pre-World War One had developed metal industries, involving some of the highest concentrations of industrial workers in the world,¹⁷ these were dominated by foreign owners¹⁸ and surrounded by an ocean of backwardness. "[P]easant land-cultivation as a whole remained, right up to the revolution, at the level of the seventeenth century ..."¹⁹ In other words, a case can be made that while industrial development in the Philippines lags in certain respects behind that of 1917 Russia, much of its agriculture, and certainly its interlinkages with the world economy and culture, stand at a vastly higher level.

As noted in the previous chapter, Sison stands within the tradition that dominated Marxist thought until 1917 and then again from 1928 (the year Stalin became unquestioned dictator) – that the working class had to become a majority within society before it could launch a serious bid for power. Yet the October 1917 revolution clearly did not fit such a prescription. V. I. Lenin and Leon Trotsky, independently of each other, developed a theoretical position that, given the interlinkages of the world economy, workers' revolution in a backward country could survive – but only if it spread to the more advanced economies. Trotsky, in his history of the Russian revolution, suggests that without Lenin's embracing and arguing for such an understanding, the other leaders of the Bolsheviks would have let the moment slip, taking for granted that socialist revolution was premature.²⁰

After Lenin's death, Trotsky and his supporters continued to argue for the possibility of world revolution and against the concept of "socialism in one country" promulgated by the rising Stalinist bureaucracy. It can be argued that the smothering of Trotsky's arguments meant that for very large numbers of future revolutionaries, Sison included, the theoretical option was never available, thus limiting potential outcomes in party building.

Sison's second argument is simply that the question of the ownership of the land has to be settled in the countryside itself.

The fight had to be settled in the countryside. After the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd and Moscow there was the ensuing struggle in the countryside. First there was a time when the socialist revolutionaries were ahead of the Bolsheviks in having

¹⁷ Trotsky notes that in 1914, 17.8 per cent of American workers were in enterprises with more than 1000 workers, while in Russia the figure was 41.4 per cent, *ibid*, p 32.

¹⁸ Forty per cent of the capital stock overall, and more in the advanced sections of industry, *ibid*, p 32.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p 31.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p 343-344.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

organisations among the peasants, but eventually the peasants would follow the lead of the Bolsheviks.²¹

But while the peasants should take a role in their own liberation (and did so in Russia) this ignores once again the question of the domination of the town over the countryside, of which more below. As the history of Russian (and other) peasant uprisings over the centuries has shown, if the central government is not sympathetic to the peasants' aims (and none, until October 1917, was) then it is simply a matter of time before the rulers amass a large enough army and put down the revolt. The peasants cannot be free unless the urban population is in control, too, of its own destiny.

For Sison, it is a simple step from arguing for peasant struggle to arguing that the countryside is the locus of revolution.

In the case of the Philippines, which is semicolonial and semifeudal with no basic industries, there is what you call the chronic crisis of a social system, and that chronic crisis provides you the basis for a protracted people's war. And you could probably add the condition of good tropical terrain with plenty of vegetation, with 80 per cent of the country mountainous.²²

Once again, we are faced with the question – where is the working-class involvement in this struggle? And once again, Sison gives the answer that the working class can be symbolically represented through individual members leaving the cities to lead the people's army in the countryside.

[T]here are the party branches in communities, in factories, the party groups in urban mass organisations, and in the countryside you have the party groups in the peasant movement, and the local party branches. The People's Army would just be a bunch of peasants in the main if there is no party group within the squad, and all the way up to the company ... and you have the party committees at the higher levels of the New People's Army. So that's how the party presence is maintained, and the party is to perform the ideological, political and organisational leadership of the proletariat.²³

²¹ Interview, op cit.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

This position is clearly the orthodoxy among party members and sympathisers. Satur Ocampo, a leading member of the CPP, answered the question in virtually identical fashion:

I have come to accept the formulation that it is the party that represents the working class interests, the working class viewpoint, and it's the one that organised the people's army and got the peasantry to compose the majority of the fighting forces. The leadership of the proletariat is manifested in the New People's Army.²⁴

This view was reflected in the membership's perception of its own hierarchy:

From the earliest days, the armed struggle was regarded as a "higher form" of struggle – not only in theory but also in the minds of activists: "if you were working in the student front, you were a lesser cadre;" to organise among the proletariat meant that "you are a better cadre, because the workers are supposed to lead the revolution;" but the most prestigious work was in the rural areas with the peasants because "that's where the army will be built and the army will be the central force that will topple this government, therefore you are a first class cadre."²⁵

It is little wonder that it took Sison so long to answer the question about the working class. For him, the working class is essentially the slogan of the party, and the party consists in good part, as shall be discussed below, of former urban-based students. We have travelled a long way from Marx's grave-diggers of capitalism.

The fact that the working class is reduced to a talismanic role helps underpin the contention of this thesis that Philippine communists (both PKP and CPP) have been engaged in elitist political practice. If the working class, despite its formal centrality in Marxist theory, is not deemed capable of fighting for its own liberation, then that liberation must be fought for by an outside force. Whether that force is armed or electoral is of secondary concern. This point will be discussed further in Chapters Seven (electoralism) and Eight (guerillaism).

²⁴ Interview with author, Quezon City, June 28, 1993.

²⁵ Interview with Julius Fortuna, Kathleen Weekley, *From Vanguard to Rearguard: The Communist Party of the Philippines 1969-1993*, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, August 1996, p 105.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

AND WHAT OF THE OTHERS?

IN *Philippine Society and Revolution*, Sison deals with a wide range of social classes and sub-class formations in the Philippines. The two that impact most on this thesis, other than the working class and the various elements of the ruling class, are the peasantry and students (whom Sison groups as a significant part of the urban petit-bourgeoisie).²⁶ Sison describes the peasantry as being divided into three – rich, middle and poor – and argues:

The peasantry, i.e., the poor and middle peasants, is the natural and most reliable ally of the proletariat and it is the main force of the Philippine Revolution ... Powerful armed contingents can be drawn in large numbers by the revolutionary party of the proletariat only from the ranks of the peasantry.²⁷

In putting forward this position, Sison adheres to Marx's position that the peasantry, as a rural class, cannot emancipate itself. Peasants lead largely atomised lives, distant from political and cultural dissent and with little sustained, extensive contact among themselves.

In so far as there is merely a local interconnection among these small-holding peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no community, no national bond and no political organisation among them, they do not form a class. They are consequently incapable of enforcing their class interests in their own name, whether through a parliament or through a convention. They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented.²⁸

The question remains – who shall do the representing? There is no argument with Sison that the role falls to an urban class. But there the gap between rhetoric and reality asserts itself again. On the one hand, he argues once more: "Only under the leadership of the proletariat can the peasantry achieve liberation from its oppressors ..."²⁹ But on the other, this "proletariat", refracted through the party, resolves itself in practice as individuals who are prepared (or have no choice but) to leave the cities to join the guerilla struggle. These individuals are drawn from two groups –workers, who become declassed upon leaving the workplace as individual guerillas, and students.

²⁶ I regard it as more accurate to treat university students as being in transition between class locations. But for the purposes of the current argument, I shall use Sison's term.

²⁷ Guerrero, op cit, p 144.

²⁸ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1978, p 126.

²⁹ Guerrero, op cit, p 144.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

Why do students feature so regularly in a range of Third World struggles (Cuba, Afghanistan, Indonesia, East Timor, etc.)? Part of the answer lies in their relative freedom to organise, as compared to workers, and their concentration in large numbers, as compared to peasants. More importantly, however, students are so placed as to develop a pronounced national consciousness. Unlike the two major classes of direct producers, they combine an acute awareness of the failures of corrupt ruling classes with a sense that they represent the future of the country. They become bearers of an anguished national identity.³⁰

The CPP leadership, not least Sison himself, comes directly from this milieu. Sison attended the University of the Philippines from 1956 where he gradually embraced Marxism. The political framework of the time was set by an intellectual struggle around the influence of the Church, between communism and anti-communism, and by the emergence of a mainstream nationalism around Senator Claro Mayo Recto. The discussion circle which Sison helped found, the Student Cultural Association of the University of the Philippines, and which provided a model for the expansion of the student left which was to follow, propounded the line of Mao's national democratic revolution from the beginning.³¹

Students had every reason to be dissatisfied with their lot. In line with trends elsewhere, tertiary education expanded rapidly after World War Two. But quality was poor. As Albert Ravenholt noted in *Foreign Affairs* in April 1951:

One of the larger universities earned a profit of nearly five million dollars for its stockholders ... These profits in education are earned only at the expense of the students, many of whom work long hours to pay the fees. Classes are overcrowded, most of the professors are poorly paid, and students usually are graduated regardless of scholarship, provided they have paid the necessary tuition.³²

It was scarcely a difficult leap for at least some of the students to link the poverty they saw around them, their own limited opportunities, the lack of national development, and the impact of colonialism. Brian Harrison writes:

³⁰ Tony Cliff, *Trotskyism After Trotsky: The Origins of the International Socialists*, London, Bookmarks, 1999, pp 67-69.

³¹ Sison and Werning, *op cit*, pp 10-14.

³² Quoted in W. Macmahon Ball, *Nationalism and Communism in East Asia*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1956, pp 97-98.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

The spirit of nationalism grew inevitably with the spread of education, which not only instilled the political ideas implicit in Western culture but also stimulated individual criticism, comparison and ambition. In urban areas especially nationalism became widely felt, if not clearly understood, as a result of the spread of literacy and the development of the press. But political consciousness was confined to what was after all a small minority ...³³

Even with the granting of political independence to the Philippines, the overwhelming impact of the former colonialists was all too obvious in the post-war years. Students were uniquely placed to become the protagonists of that new national consciousness. The campuses were fertile ground for the work of Sison and his comrades in the Kabataang Makabayan.³⁴

The anti-U.S. student formations resulting from the October 24th Movement [a demonstration in 1966 against the visit of US President Lyndon Johnson] would eventually be further transformed into mass organisations devoted to social investigation and mass work among the workers and peasants throughout the latter half of the 1960s to 1972.³⁵

Critically, many of those students, especially those who went on to join the CPP, were to find themselves in the countryside from 1970 onwards organising the work of the party and the NPA. As we shall see in the next chapter, the sending of party cadres to the countryside was not a simple product of necessity, especially before President Marcos declared martial law in 1972, but a fusion of Maoist ideology and practical necessity. If the NPA was to be built, it would be the urban student radicals who would provide the officer class.

Indeed, as the party began to weaken and fracture in the lead-up to its division in the early 1980s, one of the pieces of evidence that its ideological bolts were beginning to work loose was that the flow of cadres began to reverse:

Yes, a sign of weakness. There was no lack of people who could operate illegally, because [although] in the first place the '83 to '86 flow of the mass movement generated people for the urban movement, it did not succeed in sending out advanced activists to the

³³ Brian Harrison, *South-East Asia: A Short History*, London: Macmillan, 1967, p 236.

³⁴ Patriotic Youth, founded in 1964. Sison was its national chairperson until 1968.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

countryside. That is something big lacking. And previous to that senior cadres were called to Manila starting before '83, starting in the early '80s, to revive the movement. So I thought there is a criticism that there has been a reverse flow of cadres from the countryside to the city.³⁶

As we shall see in the chapters that follow, while debate waxed and waned within the CPP about the balance between urban and rural work, few of those who dissented – including those who finally split away – were open to seeing the working class as anything other than symbols or loyal footsoldiers.

THE PHILIPPINES – A BREAKDOWN BY CLASS

WHY IS it useful to categorise the Philippine population by class? As we have seen above, in the discussion about semifeudalism, the argument put forward by the CPP is that the Philippines is still too economically backward to support a direct attempt at socialist revolution. The under-developed nature of the economy and the small size of the working class are, for the party, factors that cannot be leapfrogged and a justification for a national democratic approach to fundamental change. Sison, quoted above, argues for instance that this is a major difference between the Philippines today and Russia in 1917.

An understanding of the size and nature of the working class is therefore of importance in any discussion of the CPP's strategy. If the working class can be shown to be more substantial, more concentrated, and better organised (or potentially better organisable) than the party has argued, it may throw doubt on the policy of surrounding the cities from the countryside, and may demonstrate the possibility of the working class taking a genuinely independent leading role in any struggles. The size and weight of the working class is not an absolute determinant³⁷ but is certainly an important indicator.

What here is meant by the working class? For the purposes of this argument, I am taking the working class to contain all those persons – urban and rural, white-collar and blue-collar – who sell their ability to work for a salary or wage, and for whom that income is the only or major

³⁵ Sison and Werning, *op cit*, p 28.

³⁶ Sison, interview, *op cit*. Sison's criticisms were being directed at party leaders who were, in his view, giving too great a priority to urban organising.

³⁷ Cliff, *op cit*, pp 65-66.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

source of their livelihood. Excluded from this grouping are salaried managers and those with a reasonable degree of independent control of their working time, such as university lecturers, senior public servants, etc. However, the statistics quoted below do not necessarily share that common starting point (or indeed, any common starting point) and therefore have to be interpreted with a degree of caution.

The national picture

ACCORDING TO figures from the National Census and Statistics Office, the size of the employed labour force rose from 14.3 million in 1976 to 19.5 million in 1983³⁸ to 27 million in 1994.³⁹ The agricultural and related rural industry sector accounted for the largest proportion (52 per cent in 1983). But, significantly, when the labour force is broken down by employment patterns, wage and salary earners constitute the largest grouping (48.8 per cent in 1986), followed by own-account (self-employed) workers (39.7 per cent) and unpaid family workers (16.5 per cent).⁴⁰ Even after allowing for managerial workers (1 per cent of the labour force in 1983),⁴¹ wage and salary earners are still the largest sector.

It is difficult to break the statistics down further to give a precise picture but, in 1983, manufacturing workers numbered 1.8 million within the more general category of production and related workers (3.6 million or 18 per cent of the total workforce). Government workers, many of whom would be relatively poorly paid clerks and minor officials, were subsumed within the category of "personal services". All service workers, including those engaged in retail trades and finance, made up 29 per cent of the labour force in 1983.⁴² Even allowing for the large number of petty traders included in that figure, such figures give a broad indication that, even in one of the poorer performing economies in the south-east Asian region, the working class occupies a substantial minority position within the economy.

Michael Pinches has pointed out that the nexus between waged workers and own-account workers is much closer than has previously been thought. In his year-long survey of a shanty town in

³⁸ All figures up to 1983 quoted in Center for Labor Studies, *The Philippine Labor Situation: Selected Statistics 1984*, no place of publication given: Centre for Labor Studies, 1984.

³⁹ Mabuhay, July 1995, p 40.

⁴⁰ Elias T. Ramos, *Dualistic Unionism and Industrial Relations*, Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1990, p 26.

⁴¹ Center for Labor Studies, op cit, p 26.

⁴² Ibid, p 26.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

Metro Manila, he observed that employment patterns are fluid, with many workers moving in and out of formal and informal employment, and many own-account and unpaid (family) workers experiencing working lives (and relations with contractors/employers) that were similar to those in permanent employment.

The great majority of workers in the Visayan Area [the shanty town] experience job insecurity and periods without gainful employment, yet they also make their living in all sectors of the urban economy. Some work within the squatter settlement but most work elsewhere in Manila; they are employed in large and intermediate, as well as in small-scale, enterprises and while about a third are self-employed, the majority are wage workers ... [T]he bifurcation of the urban labour force into working class and urban poor, lumpenproletariat or even petite bourgeoisie is simplistic.⁴³

While many commentators have emphasised the weakness of working-class political culture in an under-developed country like the Philippines, Pinches' work seems to indicate that there is another side to the story, that the formal, waged (and sometimes unionised) sector sets the pace and style of economic and possibly political life among the urban poor. "Wage labor may account for two-thirds of the workers in the Visayan Area, but in terms of the total money income that flows into the community from outside, its contribution is much greater. It is wage labor more than anything else that shapes the community economy."⁴⁴ Such a conclusion means that it seems reasonable to adduce a larger social weight to the urban working class than the bare statistics might indicate.

A further factor that would seem to add weight to any hopes pitched around the urban working class is the significant proportion of workers concentrated in relatively large workplaces (those with 100 employees or more). Elias Ramos quotes statistics for Philippine manufacturing firms for the years 1979 to 1981 which contradict Sison's interpretation above. Despite overall fluctuations due to boom and recession, there is a clear pattern, with up to twice as many workers employed in large workplaces than in those employing between one and nine.⁴⁵

⁴³ Michael Pinches, "'All that we have is our muscle and sweat': The Rise of Wage Labor in a Manila Squatter Community", *Wage Labor and Social Change: The Proletariat in Asia and the Pacific*, Michael Pinches and Salim Lakha, eds., Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1992, pp 134-135.

⁴⁴ Ibid, pp 128-129.

⁴⁵ Ramos, op cit, p 27.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

This should not be taken to mean that working-class size and organisation is climbing evenly or continuously. Given the way that economic growth in the Philippines has lagged, and the weakness in the development of manufacturing industry, the opposite has sometimes been the case. While the proportion of the labour force engaged in agriculture dropped steadily, from 59.1 per cent in 1960 to 46.6 per cent in 1985, the proportion in industry also fell. After growing between 1960 to 1970, peaking at 15.9 per cent, it fell to 13 per cent in 1985. The ambiguously titled “service sector” boomed over the same period, rising from 22.2 to 34.3 per cent.⁴⁶

A countervailing factor that should be taken into account is changes within the composition of the agricultural labour force. Rene Ofreneo has pointed to the phenomenon of increasing rural proletarianisation arising from small landowners losing their land because of debts. Such dispossessed farmers swell the ranks of waged workers on plantations given over to export crops like rice, sugar, pineapples, and bananas.⁴⁷ A broader category, the landless poor, includes those who carry out waged agricultural work, unwaged agricultural work under systems like the *gama*,⁴⁸ and casual work in non-agricultural trades. One survey in a barrio in Laguna showed the number of households headed by landless agricultural workers leaping from 30 to 50 per cent between 1966 and 1976.⁴⁹

Kerkvliet, in his study of the village of San Ricardo in the Talavera municipality of Nueva Ecija, in Central Luzon, outlined three types of working class households. One (the largest category) relies almost exclusively on seasonal agricultural labouring, the second on fairly regular work for construction companies combined with agricultural labouring, and the third (the smallest example) on non-agricultural work. What is striking is that while 89 per cent of worker households fall within the category of “very poor” or “less poor”, only 53 per cent of peasant households do so.⁵⁰ The figures would seem to challenge the CPP’s easy assumption that the peasantry are bottom of the heap and therefore most revolutionary.

Of course, class position and class consciousness are not automatic partners. But the pace and extent of exploitation, both of tenant farmers and agricultural workers (who may often be the

⁴⁶ Ibid, p 19.

⁴⁷ Rene E. Ofreneo, *Capitalism in Philippine Agriculture*, Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1980, pp 87-92.

⁴⁸ Workers volunteer to weed fields for no pay in return for the right to work on the harvest, *ibid*, p 93.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p 92.

⁵⁰ Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, *Everyday Politics in the Philippines: Class and Status Relations in a Central Luzon Village*, Quezon City: New Day, 1991, pp 69-70 and p 78.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

same people, or come from the same family) has forced a degree of class identification and organisation on the rural poor. For example:

Displaced and proletarianized by export agriculture and trapped by an oppressive and obsolete land tenure system, the Filipino peasantry,⁵¹ silent since the defeat of the Huk Rebellion in the early 1950's, began to throb once again with political activism in the late sixties. In the sugar fields of Negros and Panay Islands, sugar workers forged the National Federation of Sugar Workers despite massive landlord opposition and repression. Throughout Luzon and Mindanao, groups of smallholders began to affiliate with the Federation of Free Farmers, which advocated land reform ...⁵²

Taken together, and with due regard to the fluidity of the statistics, the evidence would seem to indicate a working class that makes up some 25 to 40 per cent of the total labour force, based around a blue-collar core of some 18 per cent, plus white-collar and rural waged workers. Of course, the majority of these workers are so far unorganised, and those that do attempt to organise face sustained and sometimes bloody opposition.⁵³ Nonetheless, the social weight of the working class would seem somewhat more favourable than indicated by Sison.

CONFRONTATION VERSUS COLLABORATION

THE CPP, as we have seen, is based around a politics that sees the central need to construct a national majority that can lay the basis for the transition to national democracy. While overseas-owned capital and enterprises are clearly part of the problem, the argument as expressed by Sison and reiterated in party publications and educationals is that sections of the Filipino capitalist class – the so-called national bourgeoisie – can be part of the solution.

⁵¹ As the rest of the passage shows, the term peasantry is here clearly used to refer to the rural poor in general.

⁵² Walden Bello, David Kinley and Vincent Bielski, "Containment in the Countryside", Walden Bello, David Kinley and Elaine Elinson, *Development Debacle: The World Bank in the Philippines*, San Francisco: Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1982, p 69.

⁵³ Take just one issue of the KMU international newsletter *Correspondence* (April-June 1995) in which the union federation cites an attempt by employers to shut the Union Plastic Co. in Laguna to break the union; the sacking of 40 unionists at another Laguna-based factory; and the situation in the Bataan Export Processing Zone. "There was a time in 1987 that 95 percent of BEPZ workers were unionized. In 1988, however, the Aquino regime launched an anti-union offensive in the BEPZ. By 1991, 100 officials had been arrested, three murdered, two shot dead at a picket, and one woman organizer raped." p 5.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

I would argue that an overly pessimistic assessment of the weight of the working class seems, in the party's eyes, to add power to the argument that there needs to be national unity in order to achieve the first stage of revolution. Yet it is also true that party members continue to show enormous dedication and courage in organising among workers. At what point do these two factors – unity with the "national bourgeoisie", and the need to organise workers – come into conflict with each other?

The KMU experience

THE KILUSANG Mayo Uno (KMU or First of May Movement) was founded in May 1980.⁵⁴ It corresponded to two needs. On the one hand, the CPP's strategy required the building of a legal, mass urban base. On the other hand, many workers had come to realise that the existing, mainstream union groupings were unwilling or incapable of supporting the kind of struggles needed to win real improvements. The KMU built substantial support and a deserved reputation as a dedicated and militant trade union centre. It was founded as a substantial wave of struggle erupted.

[I]n 1981, there were around two hundred and sixty strikes across the country, involving nearly 100,000 workers and lasting an average of eighteen days each. In 1982, there were fewer strikes (158), but they lasted on average nearly double the number of days and resulted in more than twice as many labour hours lost (13.4 million) ...

Strikes and political protests then ebbed again however, as employers and the government fought back, afraid that the CPP was gaining the kind of influence in the urban labour movement that it was winning among peasants ... After a period of recovery, and matching the then broad wave of protest against the Marcos regime, [an apparent record] 282 strikes were recorded in 1984.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Weekley, *op cit*, p 145, fn 65, notes two earlier, short-lived attempts to establish CPP-led trade union associations: the first (in 1977-78) was the Buklurang Manggagawang Pilipino (BMP or Union of Filipino Workers); the second, the Kapatirang Anak-Pawis (Brotherhood of the Working Class). In parallel with the general split in the party and its associated organisations after 1993, the KMU split in 1994. The breakaway group formed the National Confederation of Labor in the Philippines, while the KMU reorganised, forming a labour centre named Koalisyon ng mga Progresibo at Makabayang Manggagawa (Coalition of Progressive and Patriotic Workers).

⁵⁵ *Ibid* p 146.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

An example of the kind of struggle the KMU led – under conditions of martial law – was at the Anson's department store in Makati. Loida Lentoco, then a new worker from the countryside, in 1991 the workplace union secretary, takes up the story:

Our union, the Anson Trade Employees' Union, was organised in mid-1980 among the 500 clerks, warehouse personnel and sales personnel. It started when oppression and harassment could no longer be borne.

Workers were forced to say "good morning" in front of a customer – if you were caught not saying it you had to repeat it 10 times. You couldn't sit or lean for a while even if you were pregnant, and you would be sent out of the selling area if you had no make-up ...

We started organising when five female workers had had enough and decided to form a union. To beat company security the women used the tactic of hiding union forms in their bras and then passing them round the selling area. Ninety nine per cent of the workers signed up – the union's first success ...

[O]n November 7 we went on strike ... We were intimidated and harassed by goons and the military but we managed to fight back. We never left the picketline and the women workers, especially the pregnant ones, were always on the front line.

On November 19 our union president and secretary were captured and detained in Camp Crame [police headquarters in Manila where political prisoners are held] ... But we stayed on the picket line, bravely shouting and singing our demands ...

After 12 days of our strike, eating, marching and sleeping on the cold pavement outside the store, we finally won ... This was the first strike by female workers ever in the Makati area and the first to break the anti-strike and anti-picketing laws, which the Aquino regime has yet to repeal.

Our struggle did not end just inside our shop. Our union does not only involve itself in local issue but also in national ones, ones affecting the working class ... We actively

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

participate whenever the KMU calls for a protest rally or other concerted actions on issues like the US bases or oil price increases.⁵⁶

This kind of story of courage, self-sacrifice and victory poses an unconscious challenge to the party's orthodoxy that martial law confirmed the secondary nature of urban struggle vis a vis armed struggle. That is not to say that union organising was easy. Active trade unionism remains a risky business, with, for example, four unionists killed, 941 arrested, 4119 assaulted on a picket line, and 309 suffering a "grave threat and coercion" while picketing, in the third quarter of 1995 alone.⁵⁷ Yet as the statistics quoted by Kathleen Weekley above demonstrate, the Marcos dictatorship was simply incapable of quelling working-class dissent.

Nonetheless, at the heart of the KMU's philosophy lies a contradiction which flows directly from the politics of the CPP – a contradiction between a militant struggle for workers' rights, and the aim of national economic development. It is a contradiction of which the KMU leadership is aware.⁵⁸ In a position document in circulation in 1986, after the fall of Marcos, the KMU combined both sides of the equation. On the one hand it put forward a 16-point plan of demands which would immediately favour its working class constituency. Such demands included the restoration of the unconditional right to strike, an end to the wage freeze, and the release of trade union and political detainees. On the other, it elaborated a Nationalist Economic Program which took as its starting point a mixed economy (albeit with a far larger state-run component than would be fashionable among economists today) and the creation of a "dynamic market".⁵⁹

Clearly, even the most cursory understanding of Marxist political economy would have equipped CPP cadres within the KMU to know that at some point, sooner or later, the unrestricted (and celebrated) right to strike would have to come into contradiction with a "dynamic market", based as it must be on competitive accumulation. There is no reason to believe that leading party members were not aware of such an outcome. But the national democratic framework dictated the need for an alliance with the nationalist bourgeoisie, which, as Sison has acknowledged,⁶⁰ had to be soothed and reassured.

⁵⁶ Interview with author, Makati, January 1991.

⁵⁷ *Correspondence*, KMU international newsletter.X, no.2, July-October 1995, p 8.

⁵⁸ They are not the only ones. Renato Constantino acknowledges the contradictions inherent in the nationalist movement, but merely writes that some "will have to be faced eventually but others will probably disappear in the course of the struggle". *Nationalism and Liberation*, Quezon City: Karrel, no date, p 48.

⁵⁹ Sofronio V. Amante, ed., *Labor's Vision of the Economic Recovery: Perspectives from Industrial, Agrarian Worker and Peasant Organizations*, Quezon City: Institute of Industrial Relations, 1986, pp 65-70.

⁶⁰ Interview, op cit.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

Many rank-and-file members of the KMU and the CPP would not be aware of the possibility that their organising against the boss could be held back at some point for fear of “frightening” the “allies” who would be exploiting them daily. The leadership certainly is. Crispin Beltran, the KMU’s national chairman, put it point blank, when asked whether the union dealt with Filipino bosses differently from overseas ones:

We make some compromises and it entails sacrifice and together [unions and the “national bourgeoisie”] we ask for better terms and conditions from the real big bosses in the international community. It’s united front work. If we consider them [Filipino bosses] as the enemy we can’t get anything from them.⁶¹

Beltran’s formulation is, in practice, an argument for soft pedalling in the KMU-led struggle against local employers. Yet smaller, Filipino-owned enterprises are likely to be just as vicious (and arguably more so) as their multinational rivals.

At its most excitable, the party leadership saw an alliance between the masses and the “national bourgeoisie” as imminent.

If, in the past, the national bourgeoisie had been content raising feeble protests against US rule in the Philippines and tailing after whichever clique in the local ruling classes was installed in power ... its antifascist and anti-imperialist stance has firmed up ... Let us foster revolutionary unity between them and the working class.⁶²

Yet such “unity” could only come at the cost of holding back, or being prepared to hold back, working-class struggle. The party’s strategic framework must contribute to a generalised underplaying of the role of working class self-activity. You cannot please two masters.

The irony of the situation is this: it seems that the idea of alliance with the national bourgeoisie and the reality have never coincided. As noted in Chapter Two, Satur Ocampo was brutally honest when he said:

⁶¹ Interview with author, Manila, February 4, 1991.

⁶² “Entire national bourgeoisie now open to revolution”, *Ang Bayan*, January 1985, p 6, quoted in Weekley, op cit, p 165.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WORKING CLASS – SYMBOL OR SUBSTANCE?

So that policy [of the NDF defending Filipino capital against multinationals] remains in the realm of theory until a palpable group of Filipino national entrepreneurs try to assert themselves against the monopoly interests of multinationals. Our experience in the last several years is that we have never been able to get the national bourgeoisie to organise. They themselves have this very strong mistrust with one another, they could not get together to fight foreign competition.

So far the party has stood strongly at the side of the workers, in these struggles, even in struggles in enterprises identifiable with the Filipino entrepreneurs, like the Concepcions for instance. Because precisely there is no manifest grouping of this national bourgeoisie identifying themselves with the national democratic movement ... we've had more difficulty winning over and getting the national bourgeoisie organised themselves for their own interests.

You're asking in theoretical terms ... I think that ... the possibility of the NDF implementing a policy of, say, modulating or subordinating the interests of workers to the interest of [the] national bourgeoisie would be only in a situation as I mentioned earlier where the struggle against foreign monopoly capital would be very manifest, but as I've said, that has not come about. There has not been a test on the application of that principle.

What has happened is that in the absence of this militancy or this spirit of the Filipino entrepreneurs to fight the multinationals ... what has been happening is that the party has been more stressing supporting the struggle of workers against the national entrepreneurs, and in the process the reverse has happened – instead of winning the national entrepreneurs, they have been identifying themselves as opponents of the movement.⁶³

While the CPP may play down the inherent and incurable class conflict between Filipino capitalists and their employees, it seems Filipino bosses have united – but against the common domestic enemy, the working class.

⁶³ Interview with author, Quezon City, June 28, 1993. One indication of links between the party and business, at least at the level of sentiment, is given by Alfred W. McCoy in *Priests on Trial*, Melbourne: Penguin, 1984, p 16. He reports that the funeral of CPP cadre Edgar Jopson in 1982 was attended by "company directors, lawyers, and senior civil servants. One management consultant told me he attended to pay tribute to a 'great Filipino patriot'." Jopson had come from a wealthy background and had attended the elite Ateneo University.

CONCLUSION

THIS CHAPTER has aimed to add weight to the central argument of this thesis that the Stalinisation of Filipino revolutionary politics has had a number of consequences. One is that the very conception of the working class as the potential self-conscious agent of history has been written out of the new orthodoxy. The “working class” has been reduced to a symbol of the power and authority of the CPP.

A second is that the working class has been downgraded – both in theoretical terms *vis-a-vis* a potential fight for socialism, and as a practical, living reality within the Philippines today.

A third is that the conception that the political horizon is bounded by national democratic revolution, which would tolerate or even encourage a “national bourgeoisie”, leads in theory and (potentially) in practice to the subordination of the needs and aims of the working class to those of an alien and hostile class, primarily manifested in a general downplaying of the importance of concrete working-class organisation and leadership.

In the following three chapters, such a theoretical position is put to the test of explaining three important episodes in the history of the CPP: the First Quarter Storm of 1970; the rising tide of mass radicalism in the late 1970s and early 1980s; and the overthrow of President Marcos in 1986.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

INTRODUCTION

*O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,*

*Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes ...*

*Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth*

*The trumpet of a prophecy. O, Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?*

— from *Ode to the West Wind*, by Percy Bysshe Shelley¹

STORMS RARELY enter unannounced. Neither do they, if they are of sufficient force, exit without leaving their mark. The events that shook Manila in the opening months of 1970, known collectively as the First Quarter Storm, fit within this framework.² The course of the First

¹ Quoted in Paul Foot, *Red Shelley*, London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1980, pp 225-226.

² The term refers to the fact that the social upheaval fell in the first quarter of that year. It was apparently coined by activists in and around the CPP-dominated Kabataang Makabayan youth movement, according to Ging Raterta, a student activist at the time. Benjamin Pimentel Jr, *Edjop: The Unusual Journey of Edgar Jopson*, Quezon City: Ken Inc, 1989, p 81.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

Quarter Storm will be outlined below. But in essence it represented the explosive combination of years of struggle among at least some Filipino workers and students in hostile circumstances, the impact of the Vietnam War and the world-wide radicalisation it had produced, and the unanswered desires of a post-war generation for the qualitative leap forward in society their leaders would not deliver.³ The First Quarter Storm was the Filipino equivalent of the student mass movement in Mexico City, the May events in France in 1968, the anti-war movement in the US, or the Moratorium movement, Clarrie O'Shea strike and associated protests in Australia.

I was in the UP [University of the Philippines] then and was one of those tens of thousands of students who got swayed by the surging movement. It was the agenda of the day, everyone was involved, almost ... It was euphoric. On a daily basis we'd have rallies and the silent majority would come out on the streets and support us. It was like victory was almost there.⁴

Such events shape political generations. How, then, did the First Quarter Storm shape the course of Philippine history? It will be my contention that the political development of radical youth in the Philippines was heavily determined by national democratic organisations run by Sison and other proto-CPP figures, which in turn reflected the fact that the core ideas of the CPP were already influential even before the party's founding in late 1968.

It will be further argued that those ideas – nationalist and elitist in terms already discussed above – impacted on the course of events. The First Quarter Storm represented the birth of mass national democratic influence, but in turn that influence was used to turn the eyes of the youth in particular away from the urban arena and towards the mountains, away from the possibility of working-class struggle and towards guerillaism.

Finally it will be argued that there were other choices in that period (not just of the First Quarter Storm itself, but in the time before and after) for those interested in revolutionary struggle, but that the CPP's growing influence marginalised such potential outcomes and set the new generation on the course that was to end in the party's splits two decades later.

³ For many young Filipinos, the events of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in China were the role model around which their dreams of the future were constructed. Alexander R. Magno, "The Filipino Left at the Crossroads: Current Debates on Strategy and Revolution", *Marxism in the Philippines*, Quezon City: Third World Studies Center, 1988, p 78.

⁴ Former CPP member, female, interview with author, Melbourne, November 16, 1997. Gregor says there were more than 250 demonstrations in the Philippines in 1970, following a strike wave from 1968-1970 which he

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

"The leaves dead are driven"

THE 1950s were, as in so many other parts of the world, a drear decade. Cold War hysteria was at its height. In the Philippines, the period saw the defeat of the PKP's guerilla strategy. The moderate import-substitutionist policies of presidents Ramon Magsaysay and Carlos P. Garcia were derided and undercut by their US counterparts.⁵ On the campuses, things were little better, as Sison recalls:

In universities there was a premium on conformity to pro-imperialist and other reactionary ideas under a thin veneer of liberal slogans like "ceaseless nonpartisan search for the elusive truth", "freedom of the individual beyond social classes", and "free marketplace of ideas".⁶

The economic, social and political stresses caused by the post-war boom and the proxy wars in Korea and Vietnam slowly began to undercut the prevailing stability. Philippine unions were given a new, protected status in 1953 that opened a period of expanding membership that lasted until the early 1980s.⁷ By the end of the 1950s, radical ideas were beginning to circulate gingerly on campuses. In 1959, Sison, his future wife Julie, and some friends made in informal discussion groups, founded a discreet Marxist study circle, which eventually became known as the Student Cultural Association of the University of the Philippines (SCAUP).⁸ Sison again writes:

describes as the biggest ever. James A. Gregor, *Crisis in the Philippines: A Threat to U.S. Interests*, Washington DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1984, p 11.

⁵ They were, in any case, a failure in their own terms. Manufacturing in the Philippines fell from 13.5 per cent of the economy in the early 1950s to 6.4 per cent in the latter part of the decade. Petronila Bn. Daroy, "On the Eve of Dictatorship and Revolution", in *Dictatorship and Revolution: Roots of People's Power*, Aurora Javate-De Dios, Petronilo Bn. Daroy and Lorna Kalaw-Tirol, eds., Manila: Conspectus, 1988, pp 10-11.

⁶ Jose Maria Sison with Rainer Werning, *The Philippine Revolution: The Leader's View*, New York: Crane Russak, 1989, p 14.

⁷ Bach M. Macaraya, *Workers' Participation in the Philippine People Power Revolution: An Examination of the Roles Played by Trade Unions in the Philippine "People Power" Revolution*, Manila: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1988, p 14.

⁸ Weekley is sceptical about the extent to which Marxism was part of the program, quoting critical comments from Francisco Nemenzo and others. However, and this is probably a key point, she also notes that such important future CPP leaders as Satur Ocampo and Rodolfo Salas were SCAUP members. Kathleen Weekley, *From Vanguard to Rearguard: The Communist Party of the Philippines 1969-1993*, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, August 1996, p 20.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

It was as a result of the work of SCAUP that in subsequent years budding Marxists and progressive liberals in alliance would prevail in campus politics and in student publications. The University of the Philippines would also serve as a base for activists reaching out to other universities and colleges throughout the country.⁹

The work bore fruit. In 1961, the Committee on Anti-Filipino Activities (CAFA) of the Philippine Congress launched an anti-communist witchhunt on the University of the Philippines campus. One of the targets was an article on the Congo written under a pen name by Sison. SCAUP responded, mobilising on March 14, 1961, 4000 students and tutors to march on Congress. The hearings were abandoned.

This demonstration would be of signal importance. It marked the end of a long period of quiescence and stultifying reaction in the entire 1950s and the beginning of the resurgence of the progressive mass movement.¹⁰

A few months later, SCAUP was turned into the nationally active Alliance for Socialist Advance (ALSA). "This indicated, according to military intelligence, the growing radicalization of Sison."¹¹

Meanwhile economic crisis led President Diosdado Macapagal, who won office in 1961, to devalue the peso and throw the economy open. Unemployment soared and social inequality grew. In 1965, the top 2.8 per cent of Filipino families had a greater share of family income than the bottom 46 per cent. Real wages fell by 8 per cent between 1962 and 1964 (and were to fall again by more than 30 per cent between 1970 and 1974).¹² All this was to pave the way for a growth in worker militancy as the 1960s wore on.

The social turmoil was rooted in the objective conditions of society which in turn made it easy for any political group – the communists as well as the traditional opposition – to use as bases for demanding change.¹³

⁹ Sison and Werning, *op cit*, p 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p 12.

¹¹ Alfredo B. Saulo, *Communism in the Philippines: An Introduction*, Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1990, preface to the enlarged edition, p 4.

¹² Daroy, *op cit*, p 12.

¹³ *Ibid*, pp 11-12.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

But it was among the youth and the students – more impatient, less weighted down with pessimism or daily cares – that the winds of revolt were stirring deepest. On October 2, 1964, 2000 students and workers¹⁴ breached the gates of the presidential palace in a demonstration against US trading privileges.¹⁵ Militants who took part in that action were central to the formation of the Kabataang Makabayan (Patriotic Youth), which was established on November 30, 1964, in Manila by the PKP's youth section, headed by Sison, who had joined the party two years earlier. Known commonly just as KM, it was "in the forefront bringing the line of national democratic revolution to all parts of the country, [sic] undertaking political demonstrations, and training large numbers of young cadres for the proletarian revolutionary party".¹⁶

According to Sison, the KM from then on was to play a central role in organising the major demonstrations which peppered the rest of the 1960s. Increasingly, opposition to the Vietnam War was the fuel which powered the movement. The Philippines was involved in two ways – by sanctioning the use of US bases in the archipelago for the war effort, and by the dispatch of the Philippine Contingent (Philcon), later renamed the Philippine Civic Action Group (Philcag).

On January 25, 1965, KM co-ordinated an anti-American (but not yet anti-war) demonstration of "20,000 workers, peasants, students, and patriotic businessmen"¹⁷ in front of the presidential palace, the Philippine Congress and the US Embassy. By the following year, when US President Lyndon Johnson arrived in Manila for a regional summit, KM was organising protests against the war itself. On October 23, a KM picket outside the President's hotel was broken up by police. The next day, 5000 students and workers demonstrated at the same place. Even though they, too, were dispersed by police, it became another point of reference for the maturing movement.¹⁸

It was against this background of growing militancy that the processes that were to culminate in the foundation of the CPP in December 1968 were taking place. The failure of the PKP's guerilla strategy (discussed in Chapter One) had left it a shell by the beginning of the 1960s. According to Sison, it did not have one active branch when he joined in December 1962 at the invitation of the party's leader, Jesus Lava. Instead, the leadership appeared to be playing out a

¹⁴ I was unable to find a breakdown of the proportion between workers and students.

¹⁵ Sison and Werning, *op. cit.*, p 35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p 32.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p 35. In the light of the discussion in the previous chapter, it is not clear if this reference to patriotic businessmen is wishful thinking or exaggeration.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p 28.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

fantasy, with quarrels over the composition of a party executive committee that had no connection with the rising tide of activism outside.¹⁹

Jesus Lava had invited Sison into the party, presumably in an attempt to co-opt through him some of the young blood the PKP so obviously needed. But Sison was not prepared to become a passive conduit for recruitment. Instead, he set out to challenge the Lava family's hold on the party.²⁰ His critical report on the party in 1965 (which was not accepted) set the scene for several years of jockeying for influence, which ended with Sison and associates deciding in 1967 to re-establish the party – in other words to break and form the CPP.²¹

By the time the CPP was established, on December 26, 1968, with Sison as the founding chair, the rest of the movement had taken further steps forward. In 1967, the Movement for the Advancement of Nationalism (MAN) was established to group together mainstream and Communist nationalists. It was a sign of the growing influence of the KM (still under Sison's leadership until 1968) that it could help lead a mass left-wing breakaway from MAN only a year later. According to Sison, by the end of the decade the KM had more than 10,000 members.²²

By 1970, demonstrations and street marches by militant student organizations which had by then achieved a high level of organization and commitment from its followers had become common occurrences. These demonstrations increasingly involved other sectors as well. Busloads of farmers from Laguna and the rice-producing provinces of Central Luzon would come to Manila to reinforce the throngs of students, young professionals, and workers from the city who marched in the streets.²³

Stirred by mass mobilisations, the trade union federations led by national democratic activists grew. A national democratic peasant federation, the Pagkakaisa ng mga Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (PMP – Unity of Philippine Peasants), was founded in 1969 and brought 20,000 on to the streets of Manila for genuine land reform before facing bloody repression.²⁴ The storm clouds were about to break.

¹⁹ Ibid, pp 43-45.

²⁰ Three Lava brothers controlled the PKP in succession – Vicente from 1942 to 1947; Jose from 1947 to 1950; and Jesus from 1951 to 1964. Saulo, op cit, preface to the enlarged edition, p 2.

²¹ According to Saulo, Sison was expelled by the PKP leadership. Ibid, preface to the enlarged edition, p 4.

²² Sison and Werning, op cit, p 36.

²³ Daroy, op cit, p 4.

²⁴ Sison and Werning, op cit, pp 35-36.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

"Hectic red"²⁵

DESPITE THE growing movement, the First Quarter Storm still came as a shock to most Filipinos. Jose F. Lacaba was a practitioner of the then "new journalism", whose on-the-spot reports published in various Manila journals have remained an invaluable resource on this period. Looking back on the First Quarter Storm, he wrote in January 1972:

No weatherman could have predicted the storm's advent and yet it was inevitable. Day by day the nation was plunging deeper and deeper into crisis ... The government was inextricably in debt, inflation was rampant, and the peso, allowed to float, promptly sank ... No money could be spared for public schools but billions were fed into the maws of the insatiable military beast ... the President himself described the country as a "social volcano".²⁶

As 1969 closed, national democratic students demonstrated in Manila against the visit of US Vice-President Spiro Agnew. Three University of the Philippines students were beaten up and arrested. When students returned after the Christmas break, the arrests became the focus of their concerns. There were demonstrations outside the presidential palace on January 7, 16 and 22. On January 26, the National Union of Students of the Philippines organised a demonstration outside the opening of Congress. Although it was called around the demand for a constitutional convention, it became the focus for the general discontent. Fifty thousand students and workers turned up.²⁷

This chapter does not aim to be an exhaustive history of the events of early 1970, but it is necessary to give a brief account of the struggle in order to understand the CPP's role within it and its growth from it. If the police had not attacked the 50,000-strong crowd to clear a way for President Marcos's limousine, the upheaval might have started later or elsewhere or not at all. But they did, turning the demonstration into a battlefield.

²⁵ Shelley's original reference was, of course, to North American indigenous people, not Marxists.

²⁶ Jose F. Lacaba, *Days of Disquiet, Nights of Rage: The First Quarter Storm and Related Events*, Manila: Asphodel Books, 1986, pp 12-13.

²⁷ Estimates, not surprisingly, vary. Bonner gives the lowest at 20,000. Raymond Bonner, *Waltzing with a Dictator: The Marcoses and the Making of American Policy*, Manila: Times Books, 1987, pp 77-78.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

About seven times the cops attacked; about seven times they retreated, often on the run, an army routed by a band of children. Each time they attacked, the cops grew more frenzied, maddened and bewildered by a defiance they had not expected and could not understand; and in the state they were in, none could expect mercy who stood his ground or was slow of foot. In full view of the television cameras, the agents of the law beat hell out of anyone who fell into their hands ...²⁸

This was the curtain-raiser to three months of rebellion involving actions in Manila of 50,000 to 100,000 people.²⁹ On January 30, in what became known as the Battle of Mendiola Bridge, national democratic students stormed Malacanang, the presidential palace, at one point breaking into the grounds and hurling molotov cocktails. The battle raged through Manila all that night, four students dying from gunshot wounds.³⁰ On February 12, the newly formed Movement for a Democratic Philippines (MDP), a coalition of national democratic groups, held a massive educational rally at the Plaza Miranda. A further mass rally on the 18th was followed by an assault on the US embassy by 5000 youths.

When the MDP called another rally at Plaza Miranda for February 26, the city authorities prohibited it, setting the scene for another night of rioting. March 3 saw a "people's march" whose size (despite a jeepney strike) showed the movement was still growing. On March 17, another people's march took a route through poorer areas to highlight the question of poverty. In formal terms, the First Quarter Storm ended there.³¹ But it had set the scene for the more widespread and protracted battles ahead, radicalising a generation.

What was the role of the CPP in these events? The balance sheet has to be carefully drawn. As Daroy notes:

It would be an exaggeration to say that these youth organizations [KM, etc], or the organizational efforts of both factions of the CPP [meaning the PKP and CPP], were responsible for the ferment in the second half of the sixties and the seventies. The youth, specifically, had been concerned with issues in the academic revolution and had been active in organizational activities and mass actions. Starting with grievances centered on

²⁸ Lacaba, *op cit*, p 16.

²⁹ Sison and Werning, *op cit*, p 37.

³⁰ This is according to Lacaba, *op cit*, p 88. Sison and Werning, *op cit*, say six, p 37.

³¹ Lacaba's account is invaluable here. This brief history is taken largely from his foreward, *op cit*, pp 11-24.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

the educational system ... they had proceeded to form alliances with equally restive sectors of society.³²

On the other hand, members of the KM and later the CPP clearly had a major influence on the tone of the mobilisations and their direction. A telling indication of their influence is their growth—clearly thousands of youths identified KM and the shadowy party behind it as the best agitators and the clearest leaders of the struggle. As Benjamin Pimentel Jr put it, “1970 was KM’s year”, with young people flocking to join in the aftermath of the first two First Quarter Storm demonstrations.

According to Baltazar Pinguel, who became national spokesman in 1970, the KM had as many as 75,000 members nationwide after the First Quarter Storm. Manila was the center of KM activity, but there were chapters in different regions from Northern Luzon to Mindanao.³³

Sison claims baldly that the new CPP “inspired and guided” the mass actions that ran from January 1970 to the declaration of martial law by President Marcos in September 1972. He also claims the personal credit for convincing the MDP to abandon compromise talks with Marcos and to go ahead as planned with its February 12 rally. “Had the mass action been called off, there would have been no First Quarter Storm of 1970.”³⁴

What seems incontrovertible is that the national democratic wing of the student movement—principally but not exclusively the KM—was prepared to seize the moment and take a leading role in the struggle. In this period the slogans of the CPP—tying the problems of the Philippines to imperialism, feudalism and fascism³⁵—were raised in front of mass audiences. NUSP leader Edgar Jopson, then a “moderate”, was only too aware of the KM’s desire to win leadership at the January 26 rally, warning groups supporting the action that violent radicals would try to infiltrate the movement. A colleague, Ed del Rosario, recalled:

³² Daroy, *op cit*, p 21.

³³ Pimentel, *op cit*, p 72. Sison is more restrained, estimating a KM membership of 20,000 in the period 1970-72. Sison and Werning, *op cit*, pp 37-38.

³⁴ *Ibid*, pp 38-39.

³⁵ Only later that year did the trinity become imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism, with fascism as their means of enforcement. Lacaba, *op cit*, pp 20-21.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

In the series of teach-ins held in different schools before the January 26 rally, we noticed other groups making different calls, like *Rebolusyon!* They had their own agenda.³⁶

It is difficult to be more precise about the role of the CPP itself. It was in January 1970 still a small organisation,³⁷ with some of its members already engaged in rural guerilla struggle (of which more below). What seems clear is that it occupied a virtually unchallenged political space as the most determined and militant opponents of the Marcos regime, an organisation advancing an analysis that it was not corrupt individuals but a corrupt system that was to blame for the country's problems.

As the movement grew and radicalised, hundreds if not thousands of young students and workers shifted sharply in the party's direction. Bonner notes that while some of the rioting students had mixed aims and unclear politics, many identified with Maoism, to the point of renaming the University of the Philippines "Stalin University".³⁸ If the CPP cannot justify a claim to have started the struggle, it certainly emerged its principal beneficiary.

A factor that worked in its favour was the high profile enjoyed by Sison. As argued in earlier chapters, it is difficult to overstate the central role played by Sison in the emergence and trajectory of the CPP. In 1970, Edgar Jopson shot to fame in the mainstream media as *the* student leader, but to the movement's militant wing Jopson was a "clerico-fascist" unworthy of comparison with Sison.

As indicated earlier in this chapter, Sison was central to the rebirth of left-wing militancy and ideology after the dark years of the late 1950s. It is worth adding that he played a leading role in most notable organisations of the 1960s. As the PKP's youth organiser he launched the KM and remained its national chair until 1968.³⁹ He also became the secretary-general of MAN. That same year, 1967, he was elected first deputy chairman of the Socialist Party of the Philippines (SPP), having already been a vice-president of the Lapiang Manggagawa (Workers' Party) which the SPP had absorbed.⁴⁰ As Pimentel notes:

³⁶ Pimentel, *op cit*, p 53.

³⁷ It had a few hundred members as of August 1970. Sison and Werning, *op cit*, p 61.

³⁸ Bonner, *op cit*, p 78.

³⁹ Daroy, *op cit*, p 19.

⁴⁰ Saulo, *op cit*, preface to the enlarged edition, p 4. No one seems to have spelled it out, but it would seem likely that the SPP was the public face of the PKP.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

He [Sison] was, by then, the undisputed leader of this pack of budding revolutionaries, intellectual rebels who had finally found a cause. Sison was no James Dean – he wore thick-rimmed glasses, had thick upper lips and was awkward in his movement – but he had a sharp analytical mind, and he evinced a tremendous self-confidence which earned him the respect of his colleagues.

US-based writer Ninotchka Rosca, in an interview in New York in 1983, said: “The one person who really affected my generation and, I suppose, the generations that came after ours, there can be no question – Jose Maria Sison...”⁴¹

Sison has already indicated what he considers his greatest contribution to the First Quarter Storm. But probably his most important action, having regard to the future growth of the party and its influence, was the publication in January 1970 in mimeographed form of his *Philippine Society and Revolution*, which became the bible of the new cadres.⁴²

It is tempting to draw a comparison with Lenin, who wrote his *The State and Revolution* while in exile from the struggle in 1917. Sison, too, was away from the main arena of the movement (he was in Northern Luzon) in 1970. But from there the comparison falls down. Lenin, faced with the prospect of arrest and worse, was in the countryside out of necessity, burning with desire to be back in the revolutionary centre of Petrograd. Sison was there essentially from choice,⁴³ regarding the Manila events as a side issue to the guerilla struggle in the mountains. That is a theme to which we shall return shortly.

“Pestilence-stricken multitudes”

BEFORE WE move on to consider the CPP’s political orientation to the events of 1970, we need to consider briefly to what extent the working class in Metro Manila played a role. It is, after all, the contention of this thesis that the politics of the CPP has led it to systematically downplay and sideline the potential for independent working-class resistance. What evidence was there that such a potential existed or was realised?

⁴¹ Pimentel, op cit, p 36. For balance, it should be pointed out that Sison was not everyone’s hero. The PKP-dominated rival youth movement Malayang Pagkakaisa Kabataang Pilipino (MPKP) made a nine-point attack on him after he and the PKP parted company in 1967. Saulo, op cit, pp 138-139.

⁴² Daroy says PSR was essentially Sison’s rejected report to the PKP in book form, op cit, p 19.

⁴³ Although according to Saulo, from the time Sison went underground in 1968 he had a price on his head at times as high as 50,000 pesos, op cit, p 131.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

The level of union activity, as measured by strike notices filed and strikes actually undertaken, rose from 1965 onwards – a process brought to a halt only by the declaration of martial law in 1972. In 1965 there were 109 strikes; in 1969, 122; and in 1971, 157. While these statistics were punctuated by declines – there were, for example, only 104 strikes in 1970 itself – the pattern is clear. (There must also have been other strikes that were not notified and therefore did not appear in official statistics.)

It is clearer still if measured by the number of strike notices filed. They presumably reflect both the rise in workers' confidence and the ease with which victories could be won without a fight. In 1965 there were 527 notices; 1969, 621; 1970, 819; 1971, 979; and 1972 (not a full year), 1043. Against these statistics it has to be noted, however, that the number of workers involved in strikes was still modest – ranging in this period 1965-1972 from a low of 36,852 in 1970 to a high of 62,803 in 1969.⁴⁴

These figures would seem to bear out what has already been noted in passing: according to most observers workers were involved from the first major demonstration of 1970, that held on January 26. It also seems an increase in workers' protests formed part of the late 1960s backdrop to the explosion. But it would appear on the limited evidence to be an exaggeration to claim a decisive role for Manila workers in the First Quarter Storm itself, although the upheaval laid the basis for a sharp rise in worker combativity in the two years that followed.

What can be said are three things. First, this state of affairs is scarcely surprising. The pattern across many parts of the industrial and industrialising post-World War Two world has been that tertiary students have often acted as stormy petrels, heralding in both deed and word the much more powerful class struggles to come.⁴⁵

Second, the First Quarter Storm – like similar youth and student struggles in France and elsewhere – gave heart to workers and encouraged them to engage in battles around their own demands. This adds weight to the contention that the CPP had an immediate and viable alternative to its strategy of war in the countryside.

⁴⁴ Center for Labor Studies, *The Philippine Labor Situation: Selected Statistics 1984*, no place of publication given: Center for Labor Studies, 1984, p 81.

⁴⁵ See, for instance, Gareth Stedman Jones, "The Meaning of the Student Revolt", *Student Power: Problems, Diagnosis, Action*, Alexander Cockburn and Robin Blackburn, eds., London: Penguin, 1969, pp 25-56. Also Chris Harman, *The Fire Last Time: 1968 and After*, London: Bookmarks, 1988.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

Third, the very lack of detailed information on the moods, the confidence, the organisation and the self-activity of workers in Manila (and elsewhere) is itself an important piece of evidence for the argument that the CPP-influenced youth and intellectuals paid little more than lip service to the role of the working class. Many of the latterday historians and journalists who have written about the First Quarter Storm were veterans or witnesses of the street-fighting period and were impacted by the KM, if not the CPP. Yet even with the benefit of hindsight, there is little in their accounts of the actions of workers. Silent and nameless, the workers are marginalised once again as objects rather than subjects of history.

"Scatter ashes and sparks"

THE CPP was clearly involved in the First Quarter Storm, but how did it understand its role and aims? The party's starting point flowed from its general line of the necessity of protracted people's war. Legal, urban work could be no more than an adjunct, a source of recruits and funds, to the main task of building the New People's Army (NPA), a task which had begun before the First Quarter Storm commenced.

So just days into the First Quarter Storm period (without, of course, knowing how long and how deep the struggle would go) the party journal *Ang Bayan* argued in the light of the deaths at the Battle of Mendiola Bridge that only armed struggle could beat Marcos.⁴⁶ Its slogan over the coming period (and before martial law was declared) was to be "People's War – the answer to martial law".⁴⁷ When President Marcos used the Battle to raise the spectre of Maoist revolt, an *Ang Bayan* press release made it clear that the party's aim was not a quick seizure of power on the back of the student unrest:

For the general information of Marcos and his cowardly ilk, the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army are now engaged in a protracted people's war which is at this moment in the initial stage of strategic defensive. The Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army are not putschists.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Daroy, op cit, p 7.

⁴⁷ Rigoberto D. Tiglao, "The Consolidation of the Dictatorship", *Dictatorship and Revolution*, op cit, p 61.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Lacaba, op cit, p 20.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

The logic of such a position was that the main value of the First Quarter Storm was not to destabilise the Marcos regime in the capital, but to expose it as "fascist" and use that radicalisation as a recruiting tool for the armed struggle. As the CPP noted as the First Quarter Storm unfolded:

[T]he demonstrations have served as a rich source of activists for the national democratic revolution and therefore, of prospective members and fighters of the Communist Party of the Philippines and the New People's Army ... Ideological, political and organisational preparations are continuously being made for intensified revolutionary armed struggle in the countryside and bigger mass actions in the city against U.S. imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism.⁴⁹

This was completely consistent with the party's strategy. Sison, referring to the period immediately before the First Quarter Storm when the NPA was in formation, writes: "Since the beginning, we had plans for nationwide expansion. We wanted to deploy the most advanced elements in the urban mass movement to key areas in order to carry out revolutionary mass work and armed struggle all over the archipelago."⁵⁰ The orientation towards building the rural movement from the urban was to continue, as these later comments (noted in the previous chapter) from Sison make clear:

... the '83 to '86 flow of the mass movement generated people for the urban movement, it did not succeed in sending out advanced activists to the countryside. That is something big lacking. And previous to that senior cadres were called to Manila starting before '83, starting in the early '80s, to revive the movement. So I thought there is a criticism that there has been a reverse flow of cadres from the countryside to the city.⁵¹

It is important not to exaggerate what was, and remains, a strategy, not an iron law. The party's approach was never at any stage to *abandon* the city and the urban struggle, even in times of martial law and enforced illegality. Ben Reid notes that in 1973, when government repression and voluntary redeployment to the countryside were having their greatest impact, the CPP had 60 cadres in Metro Manila.⁵² The arguments that consumed the CPP from time to time (of which,

⁴⁹ CPP statement from *Ang Bayan*, no date, reprinted in *First Quarter Storm of 1970*, Manila: Silangan Publishers, 1970, pp 44-45, quoted in Weekley, op cit, p 39.

⁵⁰ Sison and Werning, op cit, pp 59-60.

⁵¹ Interview with author, Utrecht, July 8, 1993.

⁵² Ben Reid, *Philippine Left: Political Crisis and Social Change*, Manila: Journal of Contemporary Asia Publishers, 2000, p 19.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

more below in Chapter Six) were always about the balance of urban and rural work. Even under the immediate impact of martial law in 1972, which left around half of the CPP's cadres dead, detained or tortured, the party never considered total flight from Manila.

The view had been expressed at this time that martial law would represent the most extensive repression in the urban areas. A group of CPP leaders thus advocated pulling out all of its cadres in Metro Manila and leaving only a skeleton force, mainly for finance, intelligence, and communication purposes. The party, however, decided on the need for its cadres to maintain their legal covers and persist in both open and underground mass struggles in the urban area.⁵³

The party as a whole may have maintained a nuanced overview of its needs: for many of the rapidly radicalising youth on the streets in early 1970 and the period which followed, taking to the hills to join the armed struggle must have seemed the overwhelmingly obvious conclusion to draw. Lacaba records how the street fighter generation began to identify with the new NPA very early:

In November [1969], they called for a boycott of the [presidential] polls or half-facetiously promoted a Dante-for-President movement. Neither event attracted national attention, but in retrospect the latter now assumes significance; in it may be discerned a somewhat romantic identification with that mysterious dissident using the *nom de guerre* Dante, with whom, rumor had it that year, a former student leader had already linked up. [Dante being the NPA leader Bernabe Buscayno, the former student leader being Sison.]⁵⁴

In practice, larger and larger numbers of students started to percolate through the countryside to join the NPA squads, first in northern Luzon and later elsewhere. At one point, the number of volunteers simply swamped the tiny NPA's ability to provide weapons and training.

My friends went to the hills. It was the revolution, it was our goal to set up a big revolutionary force. For us, the revolution was equated with the hills ... It was armed struggle in the hills or social democracy.⁵⁵

⁵³ Tiglao, op cit, p 61.

⁵⁴ Lacaba, op cit, p 13.

⁵⁵ Interview with female former CPP member, op cit.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

The NPA began with 65 fighters (some of whom were pre-existing guerillas who came over to the CPP with Buscayno) and 35 weapons (of which just nine were automatics) – by the end of 1970 and the First Quarter Storm it had grown to several hundred with more than 200 automatic rifles.⁵⁶

Lacaba's reference to romantic identification is significant. We have already discussed the class nature of students and the material basis for their predisposition to radical nationalism in a developing country like the Philippines. The atomised and volatile experience of student life, with its emphasis on an intellectual training in which established ideas can run counter to the students' practical experience, has a further effect. For many students, political commitment emerges because of a burst of moral outrage which in turn leads to frenetic activism. In effect, students are likely to enter radical political activity as individuals angry about hypocrisy or injustice, whereas workers are more likely to enter the political arena as part of a collective fightback or through collective organisation.

Victor Corpus, who defected from the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in 1970 to join the NPA, only to defect back in 1976, notes that: "... the great bulk of NPA membership and the recruits that they attract are mostly young men and women in their teens or early twenties, and that majority of them [sic] are not married."⁵⁷ He goes on to explain why:

Students are generally idealistic, daring and full of vigor. Because of their concentration in schools, they are easily accessible and highly exposed to radical thoughts. Students, therefore, are the most radical and revolutionary sector of the petty bourgeoisie. It is no wonder then that the majority of CPP cadres, including its top leadership, is composed mostly of former student leaders and activists.⁵⁸

The female former CPP member quoted above said:

Just look at the leadership [of the CPP] now: [most] were former students and intellectuals. Even when I worked with the workers some of the political officers were students before, not workers. Even when I went to the hills in the 1980s most of the leaders were either previous students, previous priests or nuns.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Sison and Werning, *op cit*, pp 60-61.

⁵⁷ Victor N. Corpus, *Silent War*, Quezon City: VNC Enterprises, 1990, p 44.

⁵⁸ Corpus, *op cit*, p 55.

⁵⁹ Interview, *op cit*.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

There is yet another factor that works to attract and hold students into guerillaism – their pedagogical role. The bulk of the NPA is made up of peasants, many of them illiterate or close to being so. Of the population as a whole, they are least likely to have a grasp of political theory and of the course of Philippine history. Students who take to the hills can become teachers. The role meshes with the party's broader theory that says that the party (for which read, its urban recruits) stands in for the working class in leading the rural masses. CPP theory can give a radical gloss to what can also be read as an extension of middle-class paternalism.

As William Chapman writes:

This connection between an urban intelligentsia and agrarian rebels was an unusual phenomenon in the Philippines and one of immense importance. The peasants supplied the army and the students the ideological cement that held it all together, giving direction and purpose and a sense of ultimate victory. The students of the 1960s went on to become the leaders and disciplinarians of a mass-based organization which spread throughout the country ... Without them, the new agrarian revolt would not have taken shape at all and most certainly would by now have withered into that peculiar form of banditry common to past Philippine rebellions.⁶⁰

A consequence of their life experience is that student activists can be highly self-sacrificing and impatient at the same time. Their trajectory into radical political life pushes towards individualistic and romantic conclusions. The allure of guerillaism can be more attractive than the patient slog involved in organising among urban workers. The NPA began to organise and recruit at a time when the prestige of Che Guevara, Mao Zedong, and Ho Chi Minh's National Liberation Front were at their highest. It was surely little wonder that the young street-fighters of Manila in 1970 would barrack for Dante and that a proportion would make the trek into the hills.⁶¹

As Alex Magno has observed:

⁶⁰ William Chapman, *Inside the Philippine Revolution: The New People's Army and Its Struggle for Power*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1987, p 83.

⁶¹ Students can also be, well, undergraduate. When President Marcos sent in troops to expel students who had seized the University of the Philippines, declaring it a "liberated area" surrounded by "guerrilla fighters of the revolution", the occupiers broadcast a recording of Marcos and a mistress having sex, reducing the soldiers to laughing wrecks. Sandra Burton, *Impossible Dream: The Marcoses, the Aquinos, and the Unfinished Revolution*, New York: Warner Books, 1989, p 78.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

The CPP was established ... at a time when the international student movement was at its peak. From Paris to Berkeley, social revolution had come to be understood as the extension of mass protest action. "Student Power" ... was understood as a revolutionary force at the helm of oppressed classes in society. This notion did not fail to infect Filipino left-wing intellectuals.

Further, the student movement of the late sixties built on the premise that a student-worker alliance may directly appropriate power and transform society on the basis of such seizure. Revolutionaries raised in this period had low regard for open political parties and the politics of gradualism that this implied.⁶²

Lacaba, in a piece of journalism of remarkable prescience, wrote in the *Philippines Free Press* on March 28, 1970, of how the radicals were beginning to firm up around the slogan of "armed struggle":

These marches and confrontations are preparatory exercises for future revolutionaries. By walking for hours and hours in the heat of the sun, and then rushing despite their weariness into head-on clashes with their enemy, the radicals seem to be testing their own capacity for survival, trying to discover the limits of their endurance, the extent of their physical strength ... They are preparing their bodies, their muscles and bones, for the protracted struggle which they believe is to come.⁶³

Urban workers are not excluded from this process. Indeed, organisations pursuing the aim of protracted people's war can positively encourage worker members to join the rural struggle.⁶⁴ But a worker who enters the NPA becomes declassified. He or she is no longer operating as part of a collective workplace with the collective problems and (occasional) solutions that entails.

Again, it is important not to be one-sided. The CPP did continuous and important organising work among urban workers despite hardship and sacrifice. That work was to pay off in the years of martial law (of which, more below). But the party's general approach to the First Quarter

⁶² Alexander R. Magno, "The Filipino Left at the Crossroads: Current Debates on Strategy and Revolution", *Marxism in the Philippines*, Quezon City: Third World Studies Center, 1988, p 79.

⁶³ Lacaba, *op cit*, p 142.

⁶⁴ Maoist militants in Bombay, for example, would regularly recruit leading worker members to the guerilla struggle, even if that meant setting back organising in some of the city's biggest workplaces. Private conversations, 1984.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

Storm period was that it was the foundation on which a substantial guerilla army could be built that might eventually prove capable of going on to the offensive against the regime. Students could and did provide a major part of that foundation.

"The trumpet of a prophecy"

THE FIRST Quarter Storm demonstrators had raised slogans supporting the rights of workers. Two marches were held, the People's March on March 3, and the People's March against Poverty on March 17, that took the largely student radical body through some of Manila's poorest slums. For many demonstrators it was probably their first close-up view of poverty. Both the marches received positive support from workers – cheers, glasses of water, small donations.⁶⁵ A Tondo street trader, Gloria Diang Sena, told the *New York Times*:

The government never kept its promises before. Now the students are forcing the government to keep their word ... I hate violence and fighting. A revolution would be a terrible thing for the Philippines. But I have 10 children to feed. Prices keep going up but not the money my husband brings home. If it takes a revolution to feed my children, then I say let's have it.⁶⁶

But for the moment it was the students who were active, the workers passive.

These members of the Silent Majority [the urban poor] may not understand the high-sounding slogans ... but when they hear the students shouting, "*Mabuhay ang magsasaka! Mabuhay ang manggagawa! Mabuhay ang mahihirap!*" [Long live the peasants, long live the workers, long live the poor] they know it is for them the students are fighting.⁶⁷

It was not long, however, before the urban poor began to move into action on their own account. It was to be a movement that martial law was able only to delay, not destroy. The value of drawing attention to this resistance is to make the point that the options for the CPP and the

⁶⁵ Lacaba records both marches, op cit, pp 126-148.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Daniel B. Schirmer and Stephen Roskamm Shalom, eds., *The Philippines Reader: A History of Colonialism, Neocolonialism, Dictatorship and Resistance*, Quezon City: KEN Incorporated, 1987, pp 158-161.

⁶⁷ Lacaba, op cit, p 129.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

new radicals were open, that there was a working class and largely urban alternative to the rural-based model of guerilla resistance.

As we have seen, the strike movement was growing through the period of 1971 and 1972. The declaration of martial law on September 21, 1972, was a body blow to the workers' movement. President Marcos issued General Order No. 5 which outlawed all forms of strikes and other kinds of public assemblies. Under pressure from unions both locally and internationally, he later amended this prohibition, allowing strikes where they did not affect "vital" industries. The definition of vital industries was so broad – and the discretion given to the Secretary of Labor so sweeping – that in practice the ban still held. There were no notified strikes in 1973 and 1974.⁶⁸ Yet in the face of this repression, the first breakthrough came remarkably swiftly. In October 1975 the strike by 5000 workers at the La Tondena Company in Manila smashed the government's ban.

... the La Tondena strike had broken the climate of fear. Before the year ended, workers in 26 companies followed suit with a spate of "illegal" strikes. The following year, the militant Left-led labor unions staged the first big May 1 rally ...⁶⁹

The official strike figures, despite their limitations, also plot the upward curve. In 1975 there were five strikes, 86 in 1976, 86, 30 in 1977, 47 in 1978, 39 in 1979, 62 in 1980, 260 in 1981, 158 in 1982, and 148 in 1983. As before, the number of strike notices filed grew even more strongly, peaking at 781 in 1981.⁷⁰

Supposedly, martial law was a clinching reason for the CPP's argument that victory had to come from encircling the city from the countryside. Yet the CPP's own cadres were involved in open organising in Metro Manila at the height of martial law. In the previous chapter, we have already seen how the KMU organised and put itself in the middle of the strike wave. But even earlier, in December 1975, 6000 marched on Malacanang to protest at a meeting between Marcos and US President Gerald Ford. Although they were blocked by riot police, the very fact that the march was possible was a victory. It can be argued that such a victory was made possible by the earlier resistance in the factories.

⁶⁸ Edberto M. Villegas, *The Political Economy of Philippine Labor Laws*, Quezon City: Foundation for Nationalist Studies, 1988, pp 61-64.

⁶⁹ Tiglao, op cit, p 62. There had, in fact, been other strikes before La Tondena, but they had failed to make the same impact. War on Want, *Makibaka! Join Us in Struggle!*, London: War on Want, 1980, pp 40-41.

⁷⁰ Center for Labor Studies, op cit, p 81.

CHAPTER FIVE: IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

While any form of political organisation in Manila under martial law was always going to be difficult and dangerous, it was always likely that resistance would rekindle in the factories. The collective nature of production makes the workplace relatively safer on a number of counts: when action is taken it is more difficult to victimise individuals; the employer needs the workforce, especially if it has skills that would be difficult to replace and whose loss would hold up production and lose a share in a competitive market; the factory is itself a valuable resource, vulnerable to occupation because the use of brute force for repression could damage machines as well as bodies.

The CPP was incapable of appreciating these opportunities because it saw workers in practice as just another urban sector, one that at best could provide recruits and funds for the NPA. So when the movement began to revive the CPP was part of it, but oblivious to the potential that would culminate in 1986.

CONCLUSION

THE CPP played an important role in pushing forward the First Quarter Storm. It was always the most likely of all the left-wing formations to make gains from the period of radicalisation because of its committed cadres, its militancy and self-sacrifice. And it did indeed recruit relatively heavily, primarily among tertiary students.

As we have seen, the CPP did not turn to armed struggle because of martial law – rather it was raising the spectre of martial law several years before its implementation to argue the case for the NPA. This political framework, one that pointed away from the prospect of urban victory and downplayed the role played by urban workers, coupled with the romantic individualism of students, meant that the new recruits were for the most part to become trainee guerillas.

While some CPP members continued with the task of legal or semi-legal organising among workers, this was always seen as secondary. The ability of workers to defy martial law might have suggested an alternative to the strategy of armed struggle. But by then the political legacy of the First Quarter Storm had long since been channelled into the prosecution of protracted people's war. The First Quarter Storm shook the Philippine capital – but the role of the CPP meant that the new cohort of revolutionary recruits was to expend its energy in quite different surroundings.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

INTRODUCTION

THE MARCOS dictatorship years were good for the CPP. Both the party and the New People's Army (NPA) grew at a giddy rate. There were a few hundred party members in 1970-71 – about 35,000 by 1986; the NPA deployed a tiny number of obsolete rifles in 1969 – more than 7000 high-powered ones in 1986.¹ Sison's second major work, *Specific Characteristics of Our People's War*, published on December 1, 1974, argued for a decentralised military build-up and was proven correct.² The CPP had a popular legitimacy among those against the regime because of its thorough-going opposition to Marcos and its role in the earlier mass movement. Its strategy of armed struggle also seemed to many people to be the only practical way of organising. Although some of the social-democratic Left at one point toyed gingerly with armed struggle,³ the CPP's unabashed and unquestionably committed approach put it in a commanding position among those who wanted resistance.

As Joel Rocamora⁴ puts it:

¹ Jose Maria Sison with Rainer Werning, *The Philippine Revolution: The Leader's View*, New York: Crane Russak, 1989, p 104.

² Amado Guerrero, *Philippine Society and Revolution, Specific Characteristics of Our People's War, and Our Urgent Task[s]*, Oakland: International Association of Filipino Patriots, 1979.

³ Anna Marie A. Karaos, "The Viability of Social Democracy as a Political Ideology in the Philippines", *Socialism: From Vision to Reality*, Pierre de Charentenay, S. J. and Anna Marie A. Karaos, Quezon City: Institute on Church and Social Issues, 1987, p 82.

⁴ Rocamora is a consultant of the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement and a fellow of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam. He was active in the national democratic movement, although it is not clear if he was a CPP member. He has written, as the CPP would see it, provocatively about the decline of the party. Sison does not hold him in high regard: "So it has come to pass that the bourgeois funding agencies have created a coterie of right opportunists. And these urban-based institutions have been able to deflect the interest of educated young people from going to the countryside. And also from doing work among the masses. The most vocal advocates of ultrademocracy are people who are in fact NGO bureaucrats. You try to consider this: study one by one. Rocamora is the consultant of PRRM...Every one of the leading lights is ensconced in some

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

For the CPP, which had defined itself to start with as illegal and therefore subject to suppression because of its choice of armed struggle, the imposition of dictatorship, as it were, confirmed this self-image and justified the sacrifices required by clandestinity ... Since the CPP had laid the groundwork for operating underground for several years before 1972, it was better placed to advance under those conditions than other groups. In addition, Marcos' attempt at a radical revision of the terms of upper class rule gave credence to the equally radical if qualitatively different political project of the CPP. Martial law changed the dialectic of reform and revolution in favour of the revolutionaries.⁵

Yet these same years were far from stable and united for the party. As we shall see in more detail below in this chapter, debates began to emerge about the relationship between rural and urban struggle, about how insurrection could be combined with the general strategy of surrounding the cities from the countryside, and about the relationship between legal and underground work.

These debates were given added urgency by events elsewhere – above all the successful overthrow of the Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza in 1979. But many of the stresses and strains were already beginning to emerge before that. They continued to grow throughout the 1980s, many years before the terminal crisis of European Stalinism. This adds weight to the contention of this thesis that the problems that have beset the CPP cannot be dismissed as the backwash from recent world events or worldwide intellectual trends, as some would argue,⁶ but have to be seen as part of the philosophical weaknesses imported into the movement via the Maoist version of Stalinism.

In this chapter, I shall outline the debates that emerged in CPP and NPA circles, and attempt to place them in their context. I shall argue that the tensions were inherent in the party's general strategic orientation. Far from being accidental features, they flowed from the continuing failure among CPP members to break out of the explanatory framework that posits armed struggle as

offices, that are supported through project proposals to bourgeois funding agencies." Interview with author, Utrecht, July 8, 1993. Antonio Zumel says Rocamora intervened in the inner-party debate using the pseudonym Tales Duhaylungsod (Tales of Two Cities). *Joel Rocamora: From the Left (If He Ever Was There) to the Very Rabid Right*. <http://www.geocities.com/~cpp-ndf/cpp6.htm>.

⁵ Joel Rocamora, "The Crisis in the National Democratic Movement and the Transformation of the Philippine Left", *Debate* 6, 1993, p 9.

⁶ Interview with Sison, op cit. Interview with Satur Ocampo, Quezon City, June 28, 1993.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

the only truly revolutionary form of practice and legal (and mostly urban, working-class focused) work as inherently reformist.

One consequence of that general failure to construct a useful and stable framework for revolutionary practice is that everyone made mistakes. Sometimes, of course, the debate could not be neatly divided into two. Both sides were able, correctly, to point out errors in their opponents' strategy and tactics. But neither side has yet proved able to form a new and sustainable synthesis. This leads me to argue further that the flawed foundation that underpinned the party's internal debates laid the basis not only for its disastrous intervention in the events surrounding the fall in 1986 of the Marcos regime commonly known as the EDSA revolution, but also for the split in the CPP in the early 1990s.

The overall purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to continue to flesh out the argument that the split was not only a conjunctural phenomenon, but had its roots in a series of theoretical weaknesses that began to lead to centrifugal forces within the CPP and that were wreaking havoc long before.

Two notes. The nature of inner-party debate in an underground organisation places limitations on the amount of written material available to the researcher. While there is a substantial literature on the 1986 period, the CPP's debates of the 1970s and 1980s are much more hidden. I have had to rely here on a much smaller array of sources than might otherwise be desirable. Many of these works have been written relatively recently to explain the split. Each author's view of history is therefore even more partisan than "normal", meaning that sometimes the course of events has had to be gleaned from what is unsaid, as much as from what is asserted. As with astrophysics, sometimes it is possible to say that a phenomenon exists only by noting the effects it may cause on other bodies.

Furthermore, while this chapter deals with the development of the debate up to the EDSA revolution, the argument cannot be fitted neatly into a chronological framework. I will be forced from time to time to refer to developments in the inner-party debate that will be covered more fully in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

THE 1970s: GROWING PAINS

JOSE MARIA Sison's third major written contribution to the development of the party was published in the CPP's theoretical journal *Rebolusyon* on July 1, 1976. *Our Urgent Tasks* was, as the name implied, more of a call to action than a philosophical work, arguing for a number of corrections to the party's activities in the light of its experience under martial law. "We have made some modest achievements on the basis of which we can advance further. But we have also had certain errors and weaknesses which we must rectify so that we will not be weighed down and dragged down by these and so that we will win more and greater victories."⁷

While *Our Urgent Tasks* also contained a summary of the state of the Marcos regime and the Philippine economy, for the purposes of this thesis what is most important about the work is the extent to which it sheds light on some of the divergences already developing among CPP cadres. A number of themes emerge which will become remarkably familiar throughout the next two decades. The most important of those themes are outlined here. In retrospect the fault lines in the party are already traceable in shadowy form at this point.

1) The low level of theoretical understanding within the party

SISON CRITICISED both petit-bourgeois members who could not link their reading to concrete conditions, and those from working-class or peasant families who shunned theory. Compared to later polemics his tone is friendly and inclusive.⁸ He pointed out that the party had had to develop and learn a great deal in a short time, that theory must be accessible, that some comrades may have ducked reading because they had been "browbeaten", and that the party must take responsibility for politically developing the members by publishing a journal (*Rebolusyon*) and convening conferences.⁹

With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that behind the velvety phrases Sison was even then beginning to sharpen his attacks on possible intellectual challengers. His criticism of the petit-bourgeois members (presumably former or current students) is appreciably sharper than those against workers or peasants. So it is the "dogmatist tendency" that "would rather rest content

⁷ Guerrero, op cit, p 227.

⁸ See, for example, Armando Liwanag, "Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors", *Kasarinlan*, 8, no. 1, 1992, pp 82-133.

⁹ Guerrero, op cit, pp 228-229.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

with parallelisms, analogies, quotations and phrase-mongering. There is even the notion that we do not deserve to be called revolutionaries if we cannot copy a successful revolution from abroad".¹⁰ It is the "dogmatists" who are guilty of browbeating.

This concern about the political level of the CPP membership will occur over and again. In *General Review*, for example, a document written in 1992, Sison notes sadly of the period in the early 1980s that "the work of drafting the regular and special courses, and the translation and publication of many other reading materials needed by Party cadres and members were neglected". A consequence was that hostile theories – "dependent capitalism, Eurocommunist theories, social democracy, and various types of insurrectional lines or urban terrorism" – impacted on the party.¹¹

2) Lack of attention to detail in building a solid base

SISON STRESSED that it was a "matter of necessity" that the party extend the field of operation of the NPA. In *Specific Characteristics* he had already outlined the necessity of operating on a number of fronts in order to stretch the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and prevent it from wiping out a considerable portion of the NPA at one go. The extent to which the CPP and the NPA had grown and prospered since 1969 indicated that this was a useful approach.

But expansion, he warned in *Our Urgent Tasks*, carried with it risks of its own. "Haphazard organising" had led to "unreliable elements" leading barrio committees – often simply the first people that guerillas had contacted. That in turn meant there was insufficient consolidation and political work to ensure that the small number of NPAs in the area were backed up by a mass of local activists.

¹⁰ Ibid, p 228. Although there is no way of being sure, the term parallelisms raises the possibility that even in 1975 some members were looking to the Russian revolutionary experience rather than the Chinese experience which constituted the CPP orthodoxy. There were certainly members tempted by urban guerilla warfare. Writing in the 1990s, Sison noted: "[T]he line of urban guerilla warfare (Carlos Marighela) and the foco theory (promoted by Regis Debray), which some elements tried to promote within the Party in the early 1970s but which were effectively combatted by the Party." Liwanag, op cit, p 98.

¹¹ CPP, "General Review of Significant Events and Decisions (1980-1991)", *Debate* 7, 1993, p 47. The document was originally published in Pilipino as "Pangkalahatang Pagbabalik-Aral sa mga Mahahalagang Pangyayari at Pasya (1980 Hanggang 1991)" in a special edition of *Rebolusyon* in January 1993. The document was attributed to the Central Committee of the CPP as of July 1992, but was "finalized" by the Executive Committee of the CC in November 1992. The document is also referred to as "Pagbabalik-aral" or simply PPW in further inner-party debates. Sison is the probable author.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

With mass support wide or narrow but shallow there are those who engage in military actions against enemy troops and then when enemy reaction rises, they do not know where to go or the enemy catches up with them. They fail to recognise that to support and ensure the success of any important action, military or otherwise, requires painstaking mass work.¹²

A failure to build strong roots, Sison argued, led to "commandism" – telling people what to do without winning their understanding. This argument foreshadows with unnerving accuracy the debates that would explode in the mid-1980s over the party's work in Mindanao.

3) The tendency to pull away from armed struggle

SISON BERATED sections of the party for avoiding armed struggle by enjoying "the conveniences of one barrio and fail[ing] to venture out and do mass work".¹³ But more significantly for the long term, he also criticised those "Right opportunists" who relied upon "sweeping propaganda work" – especially those "in a certain region" who raised the "proposal to superimpose the slogan demanding general election in the country on other slogans asserting the democratic rights and interests of the basic masses".¹⁴

The "certain region" was Manila-Rizal. According to regional party leader Julius Fortuna, the regional party committee (KR-MR) proposed in 1974 a campaign under the code name *Unos*, which would involve forming an alliance with sections of the bourgeoisie who, disaffected with Marcos, were harking back to the 1935 constitution.

The plan was "to come up with a parallel campaign" to that of the bourgeois opposition, and eventually to join them "in a broader ... anti-fascist, legal front." The KR-MR "had no illusion" of gaining power in Manila; "we could only win power through a people's war, that premise was never challenged by [our] proposal." The object of the campaign was to "divide Marcos [from] the other reactionaries," and in the process to spread the national democratic message further and perhaps to dictate the "anti-fascist" agenda ...

¹² Guerrero, *op cit*, p 231.

¹³ *Ibid*, p 231.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

Fortuna insists that he and his comrades simply believed that the capital city was of greater strategic significance than is assumed in the protracted people's war model: "[If] you get Manila, you get a large part of the Philippines." The city could help to create a revolutionary situation rather than simply wait to play a supporting role in a drama scripted and enacted by the armed forces in the countryside. Part of the capital's contribution to the revolution, KR-MR cadres thought, would be the mobilisation of the masses along with the "middle forces", demanding an end to martial law.¹⁵

The plan was quickly dropped when it ran into blanket opposition from Sison and the rest of the central leadership. Sison reminded the MR comrades that the tempo of the urban mass movement had to be subordinated to the growth of the armed struggle.¹⁶ But that did not stop the MR leadership once more tilting away from orthodoxy just a year later, in 1975.

The Manila-Rizal Committee (under the leadership of [Filemon] Lagman) announced its intention to participate in a campaign to demand elections which would be "the last alternative for a 'peaceful revolution', before the majority ... understand and support the only true alternative ... the armed revolution for national democracy." The urban masses, they said, would be prepared to defend demands for an end to martial rule and for democratic elections; after that, the Party would raise their struggle to greater heights.¹⁷

Once again the Central Committee slapped down the deviationists, who had dared to suggest that Marcos could be forced out through the electoral process.¹⁸ It was against this background that *Our Urgent Tasks* made its criticisms. Yet overall, it is a positive document. Sison was clearly proud of how far and fast his new party had travelled. There were genuine gains in numbers, profile, prestige and geographical spread which justified a little self-congratulation. Why then, only seven years after the launching of the armed struggle, with the Marcos dictatorship making the party's line more credible and relevant to members and supporters than before, and with negligible "external shocks" to shatter members' self-confidence, had differences already begun to emerge?

¹⁴ Ibid, p 232.

¹⁵ Kathleen Weekley, *From Vanguard to Rearguard: The Communist Party of the Philippines 1969-1993*, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, August 1996, p 137.

¹⁶ Ibid, p 137.

¹⁷ Ibid, p 138.

¹⁸ Gregg R. Jones, *Red Revolution: Inside the Philippine Guerrilla Movement*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1989 p 114.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

One reason lay in the very strategy that had led to such success. The approach of spreading the NPA in squads or platoons across the length of the archipelago made the CPP's guerillas much more effective than the Huks had ever been. But the strategy necessarily involved placing a premium on local initiative. In 1976, this centrifugal force seems to have been more of a low-key irritant to Sison and his fellow leaders than a serious threat.¹⁹ But within a few years, as we will see below, it would lead to a major level of experimentation with new tactics (in Mindanao above all). A decade later, localism would lead to a situation where some NPA units were negotiating local ceasefires or endorsing the Aquino government.

The second reason lay, as this thesis has argued throughout, in the confused roots of the CPP's politics. Its transfer of the Maoist experience to the Philippines, on the basis that the main enemy was the "fascist" Marcos and the key strategy was armed struggle in the countryside, proved a flimsy foundation for solid expansion. Because the Maoist-Sison orthodoxy had collaboration with the "national bourgeoisie" and the urban middle class built into it, it was not difficult for sections of the party – especially those in Metro Manila who had regular contact with such class elements – to construct alternate versions of a cross-class alliance. If Sison was angry with the deviation, it was his own theory, and its de facto abandonment of the leading role of the working class, that made it seemingly legitimate.

The rumblings in Manila were a warning that the strategy had fundamental flaws. Yet at this stage, all the protagonists saw themselves as loyal to protracted people's war. Weekley makes a valid point when she argues that the Manila leadership's disagreements were not properly theorised (see below). So why were they to rise over and over again? Because Fortuna was correct when he argued: "[If] you get Manila, you get a large part of the Philippines." In 1974-75, no one understood how sharp the contradiction between urban struggle and rural armed struggle could be. But theorised or not, the contradiction was to reassert itself again and again. Indeed, Filemon Lagman would eventually play a leading role in the split in the 1990s.

¹⁹ Jones says that Manila cadres were using Sison's formulations about autonomy from *Specific Characteristics* back against him as early as 1974, *ibid*, p 114.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

THE FIRST BOYCOTT CRISIS

THE EARLY symptoms of divergence went largely unnoticed.²⁰ But the calling of parliamentary elections by Marcos in 1978 revealed that *Our Urgent Tasks* had failed to rid the party of all the imperfections and minor heresies at which Sison had taken aim. As *Reaffirm* put it:

The central leadership took a decision to boycott the 1978 elections. In the process of making the decision, the leadership of the Manila-Rizal Party organisation argued for participation but were outvoted and were therefore bound to abide by the decision. But they did not carry out instructions for implementing the boycott. Hence, disciplinary measures were meted out to the regional leadership for failure or refusal to implement the Party position and for distributing a position paper to other regions.²¹

The Manila-Rizal leadership did more than disagree: it engaged in the election process by participating in the Laban ("Fight") campaign being run from prison by Benigno Aquino. Participation included standing five national democrat candidates as part of the Laban ticket. The MR leaders regarded participation as an opportunity to deepen the split among the ruling elite, conduct anti-Marcos propaganda, and raise material support for the NPA through alliance work with non-communists.²²

Jones quotes conflicting accounts of the months before the election – whether the Central Committee ordered a boycott or whether it failed to give specific instructions to the MR committee.²³ But with one week to go, the MR committee received unequivocal instructions to boycott and withdraw its five candidates. Eleven out of 13 members voted to defy the Central Committee.²⁴ "We knew we were defying the official Party position," said Remo, a Manila-Rizal committee member. "But we did so for very practical reasons. If we pushed for boycott, there would be chaos and confusion in our ranks, not to mention among our allies."²⁵

²⁰ For example, Joel Rocamora's concise overview of the party's history (*Breaking Through: The Struggle Within the Communist Party of the Philippines*, Manila: Anvil, 1994) makes no mention of problems before those discussed in this section on the 1978 election, and even then only briefly. Most people seem to have viewed the 1970s as a virtually untrammelled period of onwards and upwards for the party.

²¹ Liwanag, op cit, p 108.

²² Jones, op cit, p 115.

²³ The account in Benjamin Pimentel Jr, *Edjop: The Unusual Journey of Edgar Jopson*, Quezon City: Ken Inc, 1989, p 209, is equally ambivalent.

²⁴ Jones, op cit, p 116. The Bicol party organisation also boycotted, but later bowed without protest to party discipline, p 122.

²⁵ Pimentel, op cit, p 209.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

In practical terms, the decision made little difference. Marcos ensured the ballot was rigged and there seems little evidence that the Left made headway.²⁶ But the impact in terms of inner-party debate, at least in Metro Manila and in leading circles, was immense. Jones describes the tense skirmishing between the Manila-Rizal and national leaders, culminating in an extended meeting at a camp in eastern Nueva Ecija province in early 1979 at which the Manila-Rizal leaders feared they might be shot. In self-defence, they fired their most powerful weapon – a threat to split the party and take with them the Manila membership of around 1000. The manoeuvre may have saved their lives.²⁷

How sharply delineated were the underlying political positions? There were certainly attempts by both sides to go beyond the formal questions of party unity and loyalty. The Lagman-led Manila leadership plundered the historical record for precedents for their actions. They were barred from citing the PKP's 1946 electoral experience (regarded as beyond the pale) but found support for their position in Lenin's writings and the actions of the Bolsheviks in standing candidates at various points before October 1917. The Central Committee, in a 360-page document authored chiefly by Rodolfo Salas, Sison's successor as party chairman, relied heavily on the China model, within which the "rebels" could find no counter-arguments²⁸

The arguments were sharp, but Weekley cautions against assumptions that the two sides clearly understood the import of their positions.

Certainly, the Manila group raised crucial questions about the urban aspect of the revolutionary strategy which the central leadership could not answer to everyone's satisfaction. But as one former cadre said, one of the KT-MR's [sic] problems was that their "theoretical arguments ... were not really deviating from [the] protracted people's war [line]." Consequently, their theory did not seem to be coherent ...

At the time, a substantial divergence from the strategy could not have come from inside the Party: "One [became] a member of the CPP because of [a] belief ... in the primacy of

²⁶ Jones notes, for example, that there was no protest from urban workers when the fixed results were announced, *op cit*, p 117

²⁷ *Ibid*, p 121. Pimentel paints a relatively more relaxed picture of the extended meeting, with no mention of violence or the threat to split. He merely notes the disciplinary action against the Manila leadership and concludes: "The 1979 conference in Nueva Ecija is still a major unresolved debate in the history of the national democratic movement," *op cit*, pp 217-218.

²⁸ Jones, *op cit*, p 118. Pimentel says the Central Committee document was 200 pages, *op cit*, p 212.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

the armed struggle to achieve power. The CPP was founded on armed struggle; that was the cutting edge ... In '78, the CPP was just in its ninth year, and not mature enough to detach itself from the original sin, as it were. No-one in the CPP, not even the most avant-garde ... could have seen things in a qualitatively different way."²⁹

While it was true that the debate was still one that took place within a commonly agreed framework, a pattern was beginning to emerge (the Unos campaign of 1974, the orientation on elections of 1975 and the first boycott crisis of 1978). The dissidents may not have been willing or able to step outside the CPP (despite their threats to split) but, as described above, they were beginning to develop their theoretical justification for using elections as tactical openings to push the revolutionary message. They were also moving along the path of prioritising the urban struggle. As Ariel, a former member of the Manila-Rizal committee put it (in relation to the Unos initiative discussed above):

We did not believe that the movement in the cities should merely play a supportive role to the armed struggle in the countryside. We felt that the urban mass movement must have its own dynamism, and must be able to carry the revolution to the very centers where the enemy is strongest.³⁰

Even if party members had no idea of the ultimate direction of the debate, in practice they were beginning to rehearse some of the arguments that were to explode later, such as the extent to which Philippine revolutionaries should look to the Russian model, rather than the Chinese, or the balance between urban and rural work. Similarly, some of the contradictory stands on "principle" that were to befog the later debate were also present: key among them, how to relate to elections. The party leadership denigrated the Manila leaders as "reformists, worse than the Lavaites",³¹ but as the CPP moved into the 1980s, the "orthodox" cadres were also to dabble in electoral intervention (as we shall see in the next chapter).

Confusions such as this underlined the extent to which the national leadership had inherent problems dealing with the new formulations and the balance between urban/rural and armed/legal work – as had the PKP leadership before them. While in formal terms the party leadership dealt with the "rebels" through expulsions, suspensions and reassignments, they could not expunge

²⁹ Weekley, *op cit*, p 142. The final quote is from her interview with Nathaniel, a former united front cadre (and formerly with the Manila-Rizal branch),

³⁰ Pimentel, *op cit*, p 203.

³¹ *Ibid*, p 212.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

their ideas, for those ideas (however confused) had material roots in the potential for struggle in the urban areas.

The aftermath

THE 1979 disciplinary measures appeared to weaken the party in the capital. *Reaffirm* says the Executive Committee took control but that "for several years, there was no effective replacement of the members of the Manila-Rizal Party committee".³² This does not fully square with the account given by Rocamora. According to him, the abolition of the Manila-Rizal regional organisation was followed by the establishment of the National Urban Commission, which made:

[T]wo critical decisions, the organisation of open centers for urban mass organising especially among workers and the increased emphasis on urban alliance work. The first decision was especially important because it removed the constraints of the earlier emphasis on underground organising and allowed open ND mass organisations to benefit from the broadening effect of open organising.³³

It is possible that Sison's assessment is more downbeat than Rocamora's because Sison was in jail during this period and has no desire to allow any of the credit for effective organising to go to critics or rivals, especially given the degree of success it can be argued the party achieved. It is certainly the case that Sison wants to paint a bleak picture of the damage done by the 1978 dissenters so that he can argue that that episode did more damage to the CPP's prospects than the widely derided boycott decision of 1986 (see next chapter).³⁴

But what is most important is that both accounts recognise the rising tempo of open, urban struggle. The previous chapter included a description of the re-emergence of the workers' movement after the declaration of martial law. The Marcos regime could not force the genie back into the bottle.

[U]rban organising picked up rapidly after 1975. The first sectors to explode in a flurry of open activity were the urban poor and workers. The student movement followed in

³² Liwanag, op cit, p 108.

³³ Rocamora, op cit p 26.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

1977. Urban centers outside of Manila, especially Davao in the large southern island of Mindanao, took off in the late 1970s and soon overtook Manila in level and sophistication of mass actions.³⁵

This led to a situation, as Jones puts it, where: "Gradually, the strikes by militant workers and demonstrations by students and slum dwellers eroded the paralysis martial law had inflicted on Philippine society, enabling the revolutionary movement to step up its organizing activities in urban areas."³⁶ It seems reasonable to assume (especially given later events which will be described below) that the Manila leadership's vacillation over the election question was linked to its assessment of the state of the open, urban movement.

Given that the CPP leaned on the argument that armed struggle was justified by the Marcos regime's heavy-handedness, why would some people not see the re-emergence of the urban mass movement as justification for flirting with parliamentary forms? It would not even be necessary to formally challenge the party's orthodoxy to experiment on the point since a) there was already a built-in licence for local tactics and b) a degree of urban, legal work had always been factored in to the party's work.

On the face of it the central leadership carried the day without too many ripples. The party made a successful boycott intervention around the next elections. "After a period of ebb ... united front work bore fruit in the successful boycott of the 1981 presidential elections. NDs (national democrats) were at the core of the boycott coalition and provided much of the organisational muscle."³⁷

PRAGMATIC SHIFTING

Fuzzy theory

BY THE turn of the decade, the rise of the legal mass movement was beginning to encourage shifts within the party's practice. As already noted, the CPP leadership created a National Urban

³⁴ Liwanag, *op cit*, pp 108-109.

³⁵ Rocamora, *Debate*, *op cit*, p 10. Weekley notes that strike figures fell in the latter part of the 1970s, *op cit*, p 135. Nonetheless, the crucial gain for the movement was that it had shown that people could fight back despite martial law.

³⁶ Jones, *op cit*, p 111.

³⁷ Rocamora, *Debate*, *op cit*, p 10.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

Commission that took the place of the Manila-Rizal regional organisation and directed the work of district level party units in the capital region. An open national democratic union centre was established and open organising blossomed among new groups including "public school teachers, women's groups, medical and health services personnel, lawyers, journalists and other media workers, nationalist business people, artists and other cultural workers".³⁸

Significantly, this new style of work began to create an atmosphere of new thinking and experimentation among party members, centred on the United Front Commission (charged with NDF work) and the National Urban Commission. It seems clear that what was taking place was a reassessment of the usefulness of legal, urban work with "middle forces" (that is, the middle class and the "national bourgeoisie") that had previously been seen by the CPP as a secondary area of organisation that served to bolster the NPA's effectiveness. This reassessment:

led logically to discussions of the dialectic of "reform and revolution" and, of more practical importance, the possibility of achieving an intermediate step in the political struggle where full victory in the national democratic revolution is not achieved but a government open to the participation of national democrats is formed.³⁹

Domestic factors were meanwhile supplemented by an important international one – the success of the Sandinista revolution. In 1979 in Nicaragua, a popular insurrection overthrew the regime of Somosa. The parallels with the Philippines were powerful. Somosa, like Marcos, was a dictator whose cronyist methods had alienated a section of the capitalists and landowners. The Sandinista rebels had, like the NPA, organised among the numerically dominant peasantry and in the cities.

But the Nicaraguan experience deviated from the CPP's expectations in one important respect, with the final overthrow of the regime coming via a largely urban insurrection rather than a takeover of the cities by an engulfing peasant-based army. This gave food for thought for a number of CPP cadres. They began to investigate in a new light the final victory of the National Liberation Front in Vietnam just four years earlier, and even the Bolshevik experience in 1917.⁴⁰

The conclusions that were drawn were necessarily fuzzy at first, and led to substantial internal debate, at least among more responsible members. The caution in drawing definite conclusions probably flowed partly from the fact that many of those involved in such discussions had a

³⁸ Ibid, p 10.

³⁹ Ibid, p 11.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

decade or less of personal political experience to draw on – and a narrow political education at that – and partly because bucking the Sison-Maoist orthodoxy was not something to be contemplated lightly.

The new thinking first took definite shape in the concept of the Strategic Counter Offensive (SCO) that emerged from the deliberations of the Political Bureau (PB-CC) in 1981. The enthusiasm engendered by the rise of the movement, not least in the cities, led to the insertion of a new “stage” into the party’s previous formula for revolution.

The party leadership devised a new framework laying out three substages of the strategic defensive: the early substage, the “advanced substage” and the “strategic counteroffensive”. At that time, the party leadership said that the struggle had already reached the “advanced substage”.⁴¹

As a corollary of the new framework, the 8th Plenum of the CPP Central Committee in 1980 considered the “three strategic combinations”, which were intended to flesh out the party’s orthodoxy in the light of the rising legal struggle. The combinations were as follows: armed and unarmed; urban and rural; and national and international. It is contested whether the new formulation was adopted (Rocamora implying that was the case,⁴² *General Review* saying it was put aside for further study,⁴³ and Omar Tupaz saying the leadership adopted the theory but with members later unsure of its status⁴⁴) but as we shall see below, in practice the slogan became a guide to action for significant sections of the party that looked to take the so-called “fast track” to victory.

The SCO strategy was only sketchily theorised. Some of its proponents were beginning to challenge the foundations of protracted people’s war but they were unable or unwilling to push their conclusions through to a revision of the party’s theoretical basis. As *General Review* notes:

A proposal to categorize Philippine society as semicolonial, semifeudal and semicapitalist, based on alleged changes in the class structure which came out in a census

⁴⁰ Sison confirms this trend in the negative, by bitterly criticising it. Interview, op cit.

⁴¹ Rocamora, *Debate*, op cit, p 13.

⁴² Ibid, p 12.

⁴³ CPP, op cit, p 46.

⁴⁴ Omar Tupaz (pseudonym), “Toward a Revolutionary Strategy of the 90s”, *Debate* 1, 1991, p 9. Tupaz is Nathan Quimpo according to Antonio Zumel, *Joel Rocamora: From the Left (If He Ever Was There) to the Very Rabid Right*, <http://www.geocities.com/~cpp-ndf/cpp6.htm>.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

of the reactionary government, was submitted but turned down by the PB-CC. Rejected, too, was the proposed view that the strategy of encircling the cities from the countryside meant the building of base areas and large regular formations from the start of the people's war and therefore was particular to China and not applicable to the Philippines. Nonetheless, the impression was created that the strategic line of protracted people's war was open to fundamental revision.⁴⁵

In practice, controversial items were probably relegated to "further study".⁴⁶ At this stage, the broad success the party was enjoying, combined with an unwillingness to push disagreement too far, meant that many leading members neither wanted nor necessarily saw the need for a sharp fight over formulations. Instead, it made a series of pragmatic shifts that were based on the immediate evidence of a rising movement. One consequence of this lack of theoretical clarity was that it opened up space for even greater experimentation by regional party and NPA commands; another was to make the inner-party battles that would follow a decade later the more confusing and bitter.

Heretical practice

IF THE theory was fudged, the shifts in practice were much clearer to delineate. The party had not summed up a clear new position in a document, but the nod and a wink consequences of the debate were apparent, as *General Review* bewailed:

Incorporated into the concept of rural-urban coordination was the formula of 60-40 for rural and urban work, respectively, the concept of workers and peasants as main forces of the revolution, and the concept of political struggles with the stress on a broad political movement centered in the cities.

The proposed concept went beyond the correct policy of all-sided advance and utilization of various forms of organization and struggle: legal and illegal, open and underground, armed and non-armed. There was the tendency to give too much importance to urban struggle, if not make it the center, in the broad political preparation of the people for higher forms of warfare. It was an enticement to go out and stray from the line of

⁴⁵ CPP, op cit, p 45.

⁴⁶ Rocamora, *Debate*, op cit, p 13.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

accumulating the main strength of the revolution in the countryside, not only in the military field but also in the political sphere.⁴⁷

There were three significant implications for the party's work, all of which chipped away at the founding orthodoxy. One, the least important, was the willingness to encourage links with overseas friends and allies. There is little evidence that this had much impact on the course of the struggle, but it later opened the door to a cautious and heretical dalliance with the Soviet Union under Gorbachev, which in turn became a bone of theoretical contention in the split, as we shall see below.

The second was the beginnings of a reassessment of the role of the anti-Marcos elements among the major employers and landlords. Whereas the party had up to then routinely termed them "anti-Marcos" reactionaries, the use of a new term began to creep into the party's vocabulary, "bourgeois reformists". The implication that could be read into the change was a benigner interpretation of their possible role in any urban upheaval and the possibility of an alliance with their "left wing". *General Review* was later to argue that such an implication led in the direction of softening the NDF's platform and downplaying the leading role of the party.⁴⁸ This debate will be considered in the next chapter.

The third, and by far the most important, flow-on was in the field of military organisation. The sense of momentum and optimism created by the rising mass movement and the obvious weakening of the Marcos regime led to a view that it was possible to move on to form larger NPA units. As *General Review* summarised it:

The concept of SCO revolved around coordinated regular warfare, guerilla warfare, mass uprisings and mass action, which sought to achieve a leap in the war from the strategic defensive to the strategic stalemate, and even to decisive victory, should US imperialism and the local reactionaries be forced into a political settlement ...

[The following direct quote is presumably taken from the original documents of the period.] "At its height, regular warfare will play a leading role in decisive battles. The military requisites for the building of base areas will be achieved, and the enemy will be

⁴⁷ CPP, op cit, p 45.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p 47.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

forced to make a big change in the disposition of its forces and to concentrate them in strategic places.”⁴⁹

In practice, the shift in line signalled a move away from building squads, to platoons, to companies or even battalions – in other words from contingents of half a dozen or so up to scores or even hundreds. Alongside such “regularisation” went the development of armed partisan units – urban guerilla warfare. The theory might be vague, but clearly the party’s line was shifting, as Tupaz notes:

The concept of the “three strategic combinations” was a significant adjustment to the “protracted people’s war” strategy. It paved the way for the various concepts of the “pol-mil” (politico-military) framework, such as that adopted by the Mindanao Party machinery in 1984, and a different version taken by the Manila-Rizal region in 1988-89.⁵⁰

The cockpit of experimentation was to be Mindanao.

THE MINDANAO METHOD

MINDANAO WAS not the only region in which CPP cadres indulged in a degree of local experimentation. “During these years ... a widespread practice among leading Party committees in the regions and territories was exercising autonomy in ‘particularising’ revolutionary strategy and tactics within their scopes of work without central guidance.”⁵¹ It was, in fact, in Samar and northern Luzon that NPA commanders first began to build larger military units.⁵²

But the events in Mindanao were always likely to be of greater importance. The island is the second largest after Luzon, and has in Davao the second largest urban area outside Manila-Rizal. Distance from the capital and from NPA command must have thrown even more responsibility to elaborate on the party’s experience on to the shoulders of the local leadership. It may also be that the specific history of Mindanao – as a region that the Spanish had failed fully to quell and as a “new frontier” for settlers – also encouraged a more independent approach.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p 45.

⁵⁰ Tupaz, op cit, p 9.

⁵¹ CPP, op cit, p 47.

⁵² Rocamora, *Debate*, op cit, p 12.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

Any interpretation of the Mindanao experiment is necessarily coloured by one's broader view of the direction of the party. So *General Review* accuses local leaders⁵³ of severely overstepping the mark:

Contrary to the decision [to set aside any decision on the three strategic combinations] and without the knowledge of the PB-CC, such a concept was being promoted as a policy in Mindanao ... [P]artisan operations hit at too many targets which were not appropriate, military actions in the cities acquired undue prominence, and the partisan bases became exposed targets for the enemy's military attacks.⁵⁴

On the other hand, as Rocamora says: "The most imaginative work and the greatest effort at translating practical experience into theory occurred in Mindanao. After many years of slow and painstaking organising work, the Mindanao NDF burst into the scene in the early 1980s with a series of organising successes and a lot of new ideas."⁵⁵

For many who took part in the party's work on the island during that period, their achievements were a matter of pride. As Paco Arguelles puts it:

According to "Pagbabalik-aral" ["General Review"], the Mindanao Commission was guilty of an even worse [than the national leadership] "line deviation" and "overestimation" when, in November 1983, it formulated the conclusion that there was a "revolutionary high tide" on the island and throughout the country, the call to prepare for an antifascist uprising, and the politico-military and RA-WA [Red Area-White Area, the first under NPA control, the second under AFP control] concepts within which both of these were integrated ... [But] the revolutionary movement underestimated, rather than overestimated, that process ... The movement's fault lay not in toying with insurrection or insurrectionism, but rather in the lack of a program for insurrection.⁵⁶

⁵³ Rafael Baylosis, Benjamin de Vera and Romulo Kintanar were the key party members, according to Richard J. Kessler, *Rebellion and Repression in the Philippines*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, p. 69.

⁵⁴ CPP, op cit, p. 46.

⁵⁵ Rocamora, *Debate*, op cit, p. 11.

⁵⁶ Paco Arguelles, "Pagbabalik-aral: A-priorism Reaffirmed. A Critique of Pangkalahatang Pagbabalik-aral sa Mahahalagang Pangyayari at Pasya, 1980-1991, by the Central Committee, CPP, November 1992", *Debate* 7, 1993, pp. 16-17. Arguelles is the pseudonym of Ricardo Reyes, according to Zumel, op cit.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

A note on insurrection

IT MIGHT be useful to pause here and briefly discuss the concept of insurrection. In contradistinction to the elitist models of the coup or the conspiracy – which necessarily involve small numbers acting without the knowledge or even the approval of the mass of the population, and which if successful can represent nothing more than a shift in governing personnel – insurrection is indispensably linked to the idea of mass revolt and social revolution.

Perhaps the first attempt at insurrection in the modern world was led by the French revolutionary Babeuf in 1796. Despite its misleading title, the “Conspiracy for Equality” was founded on a degree of semi-open organisation and on a politics that was committed, in however confused a fashion, to constructing a society in which there was neither rich nor poor. The state prosecutor at Babeuf’s trial described the “conspiracy” thus:

Their means were the publication and distribution of anarchistic newspapers, writings and pamphlets ... the formation of a multitude of little clubs run by their agents; it was the establishment of organisers and flyposters; it was the corrupting of workshops; it was the infernal art of ... stirring up the people by blaming the government for all the ills resulting from current circumstances.⁵⁷

By the time of the Russian revolutions at the beginning of this century, the nature of insurrection was much more clearly delineated. Leon Trotsky defined it as a conscious act of the mass of the population against the ruling class:

A revolution takes place only when there is no other way out. And the insurrection, which rises above a revolution like a peak in the mountain chain of its events, can no more be evoked at will than the revolution as a whole. The masses advance and retreat several times before they make up their minds to the final assault ...

⁵⁷ Ian Birchall, “The Babeuf Bicentenary: Conspiracy or Revolutionary Party?”, *International Socialism* 72, 1996, p 82.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

A pure conspiracy even when victorious can only replace one clique of the same ruling class by another ... Only mass insurrection has ever brought the victory of one social regime over another.⁵⁸

However, he also defended a place for "conspiracy", insofar as it was understood as political and technical preparation, subordinated to the insurrection, that would help turn a mass uprising into a successful seizure of power.⁵⁹ In other words he was talking about political leadership in the form of a revolutionary party. The task of the party was not to seize power, but to lead the working class in doing so.

What was meant by insurrection among the ranks of the CPP? The immediate problem in answering this question comes from the fact that party members seemed to be referring to at least three revolutions, each with differing dynamics. The first was the Bolshevik, the second the Vietnamese, the third the Sandinista. Even more confusingly, Sison (as Liwanag) appears to have written a document entitled *Five Kinds of Insurrectionism* in an attack on his critics.⁶⁰ And to add to all this, Sison did not write off the idea of insurrection in principle.⁶¹

The level of conceptual chaos is illustrated in an exchange of views over a document issued by the NDF (Metro Manila-Rizal) in June 1990 – nine years after the SCO debate formally began. In it the NDF raises the question of insurrectionism to almost mythic status, comparing the actions of the armed urban partisans "to the historical significance of the FQS [First Quarter Storm] in 1970". In similar fashion, the article notes that millions need to be mobilised to make the insurrection while talking of the pol-mil struggle as targeting "individual class enemies". The article's final rhetoric sums up the heroic confusion:

The insurrectionary spirit is the noble standpoint in whatever form and arena of battle – in rallies and demonstrations, in barricades and picketlines, up to direct participation in partisan warfare and in the overall people's war.⁶²

⁵⁸ Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, London: Pluto Press, 1977, p 1017.

⁵⁹ Ibid, pp 1018-1019.

⁶⁰ Mentioned in "Ang Konsepto ng KT/KS ng 'Insureksyunismo'", (dated October 10, 1992), *Big Red Book*, no publication details, pp 99-106.

⁶¹ Liwanag, op cit, p 87.

⁶² The partisans referred to were, in particular, the Alex Boncayao Brigade, which the NDF said was "effectively established" in 1985. National Democratic Front of the Philippines (Metro Manila-Rizal), "Politico-Military Struggle in the Main Urban Center", *Debate* pilot issue, 1991, p 71. The pilot issue did not give a date or point of origin for the article, but *Debate* 1 revealed that it had been published first in Pilipino in *Taliba ng Bayan*.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

The CPP's Executive Committee responded sharply to the Manila-Rizal party Executive Committee (who were presumably responsible for the NDF statement). It deplored the pro-insurrection tone of the original article – although it did not fully repudiate it. It argued for a cautious approach to armed urban partisan struggle – but accepted its legitimacy. It criticised the pol-mil strategy's record in Mindanao – but acknowledged positive lessons, too. What rank-and-file party members understood of all this is not known.⁶³

The overseas experiences could also be interpreted in quite different ways. While the Russian experience was of the seizure of power by an armed urban working class, backed up by soldiers and sailors, and the transfer of sovereignty to councils made up of recallable delegates representing workers and the conscripts, it is not at all clear that the "insurrectionists" within the CPP understood it as such. The Stalinist roots of the party, discussed in Chapter One, meant that any understanding of the Russian revolution was gutted of its class basis. Stalinism reduced October 1917 to a ritualised worship of the memory of Lenin and turned it into an apology for the dictatorship of the party over the workers.

Even those in the CPP who saw themselves breaking from Stalinism in the early 1990s gave little indication that they had re-examined their fundamental assessment of the Russian revolution. The concept of the working class taking power in its own name and own right did not seem to be embraced in any meaningful way by the "insurrectionists" either in the 1980s or the 1990s. To have returned to the classical Marxist approach would have involved a political and organisational break with guerillaism that has never been fully demonstrated, although the writings of Sonny Melencio, noted in Chapter One, may yet prove to be an exception. (The question of perceptions of Stalinism will be further discussed in the next chapter.)

A further indication of the failure to grasp the class underpinnings of the classical Marxist understanding of insurrection is evidenced in the bracketing of the Russian experience with the Vietnamese. Ho Chi Minh's forces eradicated those revolutionary socialist elements organising in the Saigon working class in the aftermath of World War Two. The Vietcong's successful seizure of power in 1975 was an essentially military affair.⁶⁴

⁶³ CPP Central Committee – Executive Committee, "On the Concept of the 'Pol-Mil' Struggle", *Debate* 1, 1991, pp 71-73.

⁶⁴ See Jonathan Neale, *The American War: Vietnam 1960-1975*, London: Bookmarks, 2001.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

Meanwhile, in Nicaragua:

The FSLN's tactic was to create an indefinite number of operational zones through combinations of strike movements, local uprisings and the activity of its own military units.⁶⁵

It is not surprising that the pol-mil strategists adopted a combination of the Vietnamese and Nicaraguan models. They, much more than the Russian experience, fitted with the arguments being put forward by the insurrectionists within the CPP. For them the later models had the advantage of "fast tracking", seemed a better mix of urban and legal work, and maintained the centrality of the guerilla army to the process. It was against this kind of political background that the experimentation continued in Mindanao.

Three new tactics

THE ISLAND leadership (commonly referred to as the MindaCom, short for Mindanao Commission), experimented with three tactics. Each was justified by the view, expressed immediately above, that the struggle was reaching a critical and immensely potent stage, especially after the assassination of opposition leader "Ninoy" Aquino on his return to the country in 1983.

The first tactic, as already indicated, was the consolidation into larger units of the NPA troops on the island. The second was the establishment of urban guerilla units, that were to become known as the Sparrow Squads. The third was the encouragement of open, mass urban struggle, centred around the *welgang bayan* (WB - people's movement), which were effectively strikes-cum-closures of the commercial and industrial centres.

For a taste of the mood of the time, it is worth quoting at some length from a document attempting to sum up the Mindanao experience. Although the document is an attempt to rebut some of the harsh criticism of the party's record in Mindanao carried in *Reaffirm* (of which, more below), there seems little doubt that it is a fair rendering of the mood of the early 1980s.

⁶⁵ H. Weber, *Nicaragua: The Sandinista Revolution*, London 1981, p 49, quoted in Mike Gonzalez, *Nicaragua: Revolution under Siege*, London: Bookmarks, 1985, p 9.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

The period of 1983-1985 was unprecedented in terms of numbers of people taking to the streets ... Of course in each city and town you cannot expect hundreds of thousands of people due to the relatively small population. But the mobilizations ranging from 10,000 to 70,000 in each city and town were quite unprecedented ...

The November 1984 "Welga ng Bayan" had a 90% paralyzing effect on business establishments in the island's six cities and six town centers when it involved workers, urban poor, peasants, employees, students and out-of-school youth, women, small businessmen, church people, teachers and other professionals and in some cities and towns, the transport sector ...

On February 7, 1985, the Minda-wide coordinated workers strike was launched which was participated in by more than 80,000 workers from 150 factories/ plantations/companies ... On May 1, [striking] workers together with the urban poor [etc] ... launched the most paralyzing WB, manning human barricades and courageously confronting the enemy. In some cities this lasted for 3 to 4 days ...⁶⁶

It seems clear by all accounts that the Mindanao strategy had unparalleled initial success. "By 1985, the combination of urban partisan warfare, the demonstrated capability to paralyse the city with transport strikes and CPP/NPA control over most of the poor neighbourhoods in the urban area of Davao City had come close to defeating government power in the Philippine's [sic] second largest city."⁶⁷

Even *General Review* has to give grudging credit where credit is due:

The swift and big advances of the movement in Mindanao were pronounced during these years. Since 1982, Mindanao led in boldly expanding and intensifying guerilla warfare. Its contributions to the advance of the urban mass movement and protest movement were also marked.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Anonymous, "Additional Clarifications on the Mindanao Experience (Feedbacks from some Mindanao Cadres)", *Big Red Book*, op cit, p 170.

⁶⁷ Gareth Porter, "Strategic Debates and Dilemmas in the Philippine Communist Movement", *The Philippines in a Changing Southeast Asia*, Steven R. Dorr and Lt. Deborah J. Mitchell, US Defence Intelligence College, 1989, p 14, quoted in Rocamora, *Debate*, op cit, p 12.

⁶⁸ CPP, op cit, pp 49-50.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

Alongside this radicalisation, and because of its leading role, the party and the NPA grew quickly. In the city of Davao alone, party membership went from 50 in 1978 to 1000 in 1985.⁶⁹ These were clearly heady times. Yet within a short period, the party moved into sharp decline. By the time of the EDSA uprising, it was in disarray, with a membership down from 9000 to 3000, a fall in the mass base by half, and a decline in military strength from 15 or 16 NPA companies and 30 platoons to two companies and 17 platoons.⁷⁰ What had gone wrong? What lessons could be drawn for the party as a whole? The Mindanao experience quickly became the centre of a debate that flowed on into the 1990s.

Kampanyang Ahos⁷¹

THE DEBATE was always going to be emotionally charged because the sharpest blow against the party in Mindanao was not delivered by the AFP or by civilian anti-communists, but came from within. It was the NPA which executed between 600 and 900 of its own members, drove others away in fear and drastically stunted its own organisation and effectiveness. Kampanyang Ahos was launched in September 1985 to counter supposed "deep penetration agents" (DPAs). By the time it ended in March 1986, the party was in disarray and unable to intervene effectively in the wave of radicalisation that accompanied the fall of Marcos.⁷²

Ahos began because of reports that NPA leaders were being shot in the back in firefights. This led to increasingly frenzied speculation that the NPA was riddled with enemy agents. According to Walden Bello, a subsequent sober assessment shows that there were possibly five agents, of whom only three were proven guilty beyond reasonable doubt.⁷³ But once the anti-DPA campaign was under way, it took on a life of its own.

To give you a sense of the momentum of paranoia, let me recount the story of Teresa (not her real name), a young activist who was involved in the anti-DPA campaign

⁶⁹ Jones, *op cit*, p 135.

⁷⁰ Anonymous, "Annotations on the Article by T Entitled 'Comments on the Current Polemics Within the Party'", *Big Red Book*, *op cit*, p 379.

⁷¹ Kampanya means campaign, ahos means garlic.

⁷² The figures are given by Walden Bello in "The Crisis of the Philippine Progressive Movement: A Preliminary Investigation", *Debate* 4, 1992, p 48.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p 51. Alfred W. McCoy points to the way in which the AFP had in the 1950s tried to turn Huk against Huk by implying that some were collaborators. McCoy also indicates that the actual number of DPAs in Mindanao was very low. "Low Intensity Conflict in the Philippines", *Low Intensity Conflict: Theory and*

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

committee in one of the regions of Mindanao. At first, she was recruited mainly to be one of the recording secretaries. Then step by step she became a judge, as the head of the committee began to regularly consult her on the guilt or innocence of the people being arrested, many of whom she knew. At this point, she said that she gave a guilty verdict, both because she felt they were guilty but also because she felt that the campaign committee head *wanted* her to say they were guilty, and she could not afford not to do so for fear of her own security. Soon she was asked to participate in torturing people during interrogation, and she felt compelled, in fact, to hit the victims for fear that had she refused, the finger of accusation would be on her. Paranoia became normal, the number of victims mounted, and she became resigned to eventually becoming a victim herself ... [The campaign ended] ... with the party member most responsible for the executions – the head of the campaign committee – being himself executed.⁷⁴

Bello, drawing on his survey of the views of 19 NDF and CPP members in early 1992, explains this horrific phenomenon in terms of the NPA's lack of an institutionalised form of justice and what he describes as Marxism's reductionist tendency to treat individuals according to their class position and value to the cause.⁷⁵ But for the majority of his respondents, any attempt at an explanation revolves around the broader argument about whether the attempt to "fast track" military victories had become a liability for the NPA and the party.

Defenders of the pol-mil strategy (who tend later to be those supporting the splits from the party in the 1990s) reject the charge. As Bello himself points out from a "neutral" position, there is a fundamental weakness in the Reaffirmist argument blaming AHOS on an overfast military build-up, for in 1988 the NPA underwent a second round of anti-DPA hysteria. This time the outbreak was less costly, accounting for perhaps fewer than 100 lives,⁷⁶ but significantly it took place in Southern Tagalog, an area in which the party leadership hewed closely to the line of protracted people's war. As some Mindanao CPP members put it:

The revival of the AHOS issue appears to be used to discredit those who are raising questions on the old strategy and perspective of the revolution who happen to be former

Practice in Central America and South-east Asia, Barry Carr and Elaine McKay, eds., Melbourne: La Trobe University/Monash University, no date, pp 56-59.

⁷⁴ Bello, *op cit*, pp 50-51.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p 52.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p 48. Amnesty International cites a figure of 40 to 60 and reports that graves had also been found in Pampanga, Sorsogon, Negros Occidental and Misamis Oriental, although those deaths were not necessarily part

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

Mindanao cadres involved in the Ahos affair ... Linking Ahos to the alleged wrong line is very artificial. How can the "cleaning" in Leyte which happened a little bit earlier than Ahos be explained? Is Armando Liwanag [Sison] also linking the anti-impil at NCR, ST [referring to the later anti-DPA campaign in Southern Tagalog] and other regions to his thesis that at that time the wrong line was already promoted on the national and international level? This sounds very absurd.⁷⁷

Furthermore, those defending the Mindanao experience point out that errors flowing from political under-development had emerged much earlier in the region, long before any attempt had been made to reassess the line. As "Comrade Taquino" puts it:

I was first assigned to Mindanao in the first quarter of 1981 to work as a member of the committee of one of its biggest guerilla fronts ... According to them [the front committee] the history of the front followed to a certain extent a militarist line due to weak Party building since the start, around 1972 until 1977 ... Their limited familiarity with Marxist tools for assessment and summing up was the reason for their difficulty in culling lessons from their experiences ...

[A list of weaknesses concludes, tellingly, with] They also had problems since 1973 with the liquidation of the so-called "demonios" (alleged enemy agents or infiltrators) because there were no safeguards and regular processes. There was a tendency towards a narrow interpretation of class struggle as physical elimination of the perceived enemy.⁷⁸

Against these arguments, Sison and his supporters are determined to pin the blame for Ahos on to what they regard as the disastrous pol-mil strategy. In the context of the slide into internal conflict and division in the early 1990s, the undoubted horror of the Ahos episode is a political weapon to be used to its utmost. The anonymous author of *Annotations* (from the style it seems likely it was Sison himself) goes out of his way to underline the brutality of the Mindanao leadership, saying that it authorised torture, took the evidence of two DPA suspects under torture about a third person as the basis for further torture, gave the power of life and death, without appeal, to platoon leaderships, and even kidnapped someone from an institution in Manila.⁷⁹

of the 1988 anti-DPA drive. *Philippines: Human Rights Violations and the Labour Movement*. London: Amnesty International, 1991. pp 67-68.

⁷⁷ "Additional Clarifications", op cit, p 173.

⁷⁸ "Annotations", op cit, p 384. The point is similarly made by "Additional Clarifications", op cit, p 173.

⁷⁹ "Annotations", op cit, pp 379-380.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

The author defends Sison's leadership against the accusation that the anti-DPA campaign in Southern Tagalog (known as Operation Missing Link or OPML) was just as bad, arguing:

- a. The cost of AHOS was more than 950 lives. OPML was around 65.
- b. Those responsible for AHOS retained their high positions and were even further promoted and rode high with the same line that had already wrought havoc in Mindanao. Those responsible for OPML (including a PB member and several CC members) were meted out disciplinary actions, demotion and censure.
- c. AHOS was hailed until 1989 as a revolutionary success. OPML was far more promptly condemned by the Party center as criminal madness.

... [Those most responsible for AHOS] have been responsible for the destruction of a huge part of the Party and the revolutionary movement even before the rectification movement. It is imperative that their errors are properly dealt with by the rectification ... ⁸⁰

It is worth including here part of the interview with Sison in Utrecht in which the inter-relationship between Ahos and other aspects of supposed revisionism with the party are discussed, to give a sense of how the Mindanao experience is central to the debate inside the CPP:

dg/ Can I get the sequence of events clear in my mind. Are the people responsible for Kampanyang Ahos the same people who were responsible for the direction in the central leadership in the middle of the 1980s – in other words who were also responsible for softening the anti-revisionist position of the party? [Anti-revisionism in this context meaning defending Stalin against his critics.]

jms/ According to the documents ... the anti-revisionist line had to be deviated from because the Soviet Union could give help in hastening the victory.

⁸⁰ Ibid, pp 380-381.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

dg/ Is it Liwanag's position, the position of the party leadership now, that the Aho crime, the deviation from anti-revisionism and the regularisation [of the NPA], that those three things are effectively linked?

jms/ Yes, there is some inter-relation, if you study the documents.

dg/ Including the question of personnel who are responsible for these various positions?

jms/ I suppose so, on the basis of these documents ... [They] tinkered with the analysis of Philippine society [i.e., criticism of the semifeudalism analysis] so it's only a matter of uprisings first and converting the people's army into some secondary support, that sort of thing, and the army sufficiently to be guided by US army manuals ...

dg/ The US army manual, distributed among NPAs – why?

jms/ Well, the military technique and the larger formations are what are decisive for that force secondary to the uprisings! So there was the tinkering with the analysis of the Philippines situation, and the point of attack was on strategy and tactics. And then there was supposed to be the good motive of hastening the revolution and so it's only a matter of making the regularisation, getting the sufficient firepower, and you would probably get it.

dg/ And you make friends with Gorbachev.

jms/ You make friends with Gorbachev ...

dg/ Okay. So militarisation leads you to be soft on the USSR in order to get the guns; it also leads you to recruit too rapidly.

jms/ Too rapidly – you get the raw elements. You may actually be recruiting unreliable elements. And when you suffer reverses the more it gets fixed in your mind that it is not your line that is wrong in the first place, but it is because of the penetration by so-called DPAs.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

When you cannot sustain your large units because you are losing your mass base, you are even losing your reach towards those who may pay taxes, what do you do? When you have a mass base your service organisation is all over, unlike the bourgeois army you don't have special service units. You eat with the people. But if a company descends upon a village, probably in three days all the substance in the village will be eaten up.

So what do you do when a time comes when the people don't like you and it is so much easier that any chaff in the heap of grain would report you to the enemy side? You become more isolated, but you have muscle, so you are liable to make use of muscle to do hold-ups and so on and so forth, to do criminal activities just for the sake of getting the resources. So you send out special units to do robberies in the cities ...

From '86 onwards, the right opportunists in the CPP started to be very vocal. There was the over-magnification of the [1986] boycott error as the biggest error, and so a certain element would flip from left to right, say the person who wrote the militarist and insurrectionist document would be among the most prominent in describing the boycott error as the biggest error in the history of the party. Far bigger than the killing of 950 people, far bigger than [the] militarist and insurrectionist line ...

[T]he Nicaraguan paradigm offered two sides which would mislead some elements. One side is the left opportunist side which did not even take into account what the Nicaraguans themselves called exceptional conditions ... [so people are led to emulate] the final offensive in which the insurrectionist tendency was in command.

Then there is another aspect – it is the right opportunist aspect. The vanguard party is no longer needed, it must be replaced by the vanguard front. So this was one concept which began to creep in.

dg/ Which reflects what is happening under Gorbachev?

jms/ Yes, yes.⁸¹

⁸¹ Interview, op cit.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

Whose assessment holds water?

WHAT CONCLUSIONS can we draw from the sharply counterposed analyses of such a watershed event as Kampanyang Ahos? On the one hand, Sison's argument has a powerful logical flow. The drive for a hastened military victory creates the desire for larger military units that become divorced from the mass base, open to infiltration, and, to a degree, depoliticised. At the slightest setback, panic sets in and success collapses into mutual recrimination and bloodshed.

On the other hand, such phenomena, albeit on a more restricted scale, happened elsewhere — earlier in Leyte (about which nothing much seems to have been recorded) and later in Southern Tagalog under leaderships which were not "tainted" with association with the pol-mil strategy.

The problem with the debate is not that one side is lying and the other not, but that they treat the two scenarios as mutually exclusive. There is space for further readings. One attempt comes from "Ka Barry", a former Mindacom member, writing in the early 1990s in the context of Sison's *Reaffirm* document. Barry argues that it is possible to separate a strategy that looks to insurrection (which depends on the emergence of a revolutionary situation) from the practice of building large military formations and the aim of regular warfare. Indeed, he argues that it is Sison's orthodox model that encourages NPA commanders towards regularisation. While the insight is valuable, it still leaves him with no effective explanation for Ahos, trapped as he is within the guerillaist framework.⁸²

I wish to advance a further reading, one that argues that the orientation of the NPA campaign in Mindanao *did* hasten its slide into mass executions, but that this did not flow from a specific, localised mistake in conducting the war *rather from the very nature of guerilla struggle itself*. Evidence for this contention comes from arenas far removed from the Philippines. So, for example, the African National Congress tortured and killed suspected spies and others in its camps beyond the South African borders.⁸³ Jon Lee Anderson's voluminous (and sympathetic) biography of Che Guevara cites numerous examples of guerillas meting out summary capital punishment to their comrades.⁸⁴

⁸² Ka Barry, "Resist Authoritarian Tendencies Within the Party! Let a Thousand Schools of Thought Contend! Comments on the Paper 'Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors' by Armando Liwanag", *Kasarinlan* 8, no. 1, 1992, pp 137-139.

⁸³ *The Australian*, November 2, 1998.

⁸⁴ Jon Lee Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life*, London: Bantam Books, 1997. See, for example, p 279.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

As discussed previously, guerilla warfare implies a number of factors that tend towards secrecy and vulnerability, and not simply because it is an illegal activity. A guerilla army has to operate outside – and implicitly above – the mass of the population that it supposedly leads or serves. It necessarily relates or reduces political questions to military questions. It has to maintain itself at a high level of war readiness, and is therefore prone to war weariness in a way that even an illegal workplace-based organisation is not.

While the intention of “some Mindanao cadres” was to try to rescue their experience from Sison’s polemics, their description of developments over time on the island in fact adds weight to the contention that anti-DPA hysteria can develop from guerillaism per se:

[S]ome manifestations of the militarist tendency [were]: relying more on military means in solving the problem of fanatics instead of emphasizing the political means; excesses in tactical offensives and special operations; instances like firing at passenger buses and bus burnings; violation of the mass line; mishandling of minorities; liquidations and killings, etc. But [regional cadres] think this cannot be ascribed to the alleged wrong line of quick military victory because these also happened in the period 1972-1977.

Like the narrow interpretation of class struggle as violent elimination of the enemies, there must also have been a mechanical or narrow interpretation of the Maoist principle: “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun”.⁸⁵

The Kampanyang Ahos incident would seem to bear out the contention of this thesis that the confusion arising from the party’s assessment of revolutionary work as being essentially armed struggle meant that neither side could fully explain the bloodshed, even while denouncing it in the name of factional self-defence. As we shall see later, those that saw the executions as coming from a particular strategic mistake were likely to end up in the camp of Sison’s orthodoxy, those who saw it more as a tragic mistake were later more likely to gravitate towards an orientation on urban, legal and tentatively electoral struggle.

⁸⁵ “Additional Clarifications”, op cit, p 173.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

CONCLUSION

DURING THE period covered in this chapter, most observers would have seen a relatively uninterrupted rise of CPP and NPA influence. Most written accounts of internal debates and problems were not available publicly until after 1986. It is likely that the majority of party members, especially peasant activists in the provinces, would have been largely oblivious to the debates that did take place.

To the extent that differences were emerging, they were not understood clearly by the various protagonists. Both "sides", insofar as the term is useful at this stage of the party's development, agreed with the armed struggle and the need for a protracted people's war. Both sides dismissed electoral work as a means in itself to gain victory. Both sides eagerly anticipated the qualitative advances that would allow the NPA to go from the strategic defensive to the next stage in the struggle.

Yet, with the benefit of hindsight, the tensions created by the false dichotomy that has plagued Philippine communism since its foundation were once again beginning to emerge. On the one hand, many cadres were pulled towards a greater emphasis on urban, mass work – (mis)understood as involving necessary concessions towards the urban bourgeoisie and intelligentsia and their electoral agendas. The material basis for such a position included the urban background and deployment of many leading members, the rise in class struggle in the cities and the opportunities that offered, and the close ties (friendship or even family) that leading cadres (especially former students and intellectuals) had with figures in liberal bourgeois circles.⁸⁶

On the other hand, many in the party – especially its peasant base and those former students wholly committed to a voluntaristic model of self-sacrifice for the "people" – continued firmly to endorse an orthodox strategy for victory. The material basis for such an argument was strong and self-evident in their eyes: the continuing suffering of Filipinos who worked the land, the majoritarian nature of the Filipino peasantry, broadly understood, the total incapacity of the electoral system to deliver fundamental change.

To the extent that there were differences, they led to the boycott debate of 1978 and the growing disparity between party tactics in Manila and Mindanao compared to other regions. To the extent that there was agreement on some fundamentals and a lack of clarity over the terms

⁸⁶ This last point was made in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER SIX: CRACKS IN THE MONOLITH

of the disagreements, the party moved forward regardless, with tensions building largely unseen and not understood.

With this framework, the importance of the Mindanao episode to this thesis is as follows: insofar as the pol-mil strategists were correct about the rising tide of struggle, it points to the possibility of a different kind of revolutionary strategy to the CPP's, one based on the urban working class. But insofar as the defenders of the orthodoxy, like Sison, were correct in their assessment that overfast militarisation weakened the NPA's base and led to witchhunts, it indicates that any attempt to graft insurrectionary theory on to guerillaist practice leads to the worst of both worlds.

CHAPTER SEVEN: DOWN THE SLIPPERY SLOPE

INTRODUCTION

MOST OBSERVERS did not see the fissures that were beginning to emerge in the CPP. On the contrary, the widespread view in the period following the assassination of "Ninoy" Aquino in 1983 was that the party and the NPA were on the verge of potential victory. A report to the US Senate in 1985 stated:

In the 2 years since the Aquino assassination, the NPA has expanded so rapidly that it now poses a credible threat to the survival of the Philippine Government. From a total force of a few thousand armed guerillas in 1980, the NPA has grown to probably over 15,000 regulars and a somewhat larger number of part-time irregulars. These forces are fighting on as many as 60 fronts around the country, including occasional company level (200-300 men) operations. Some level of NPA activity now exists in almost all of the country's 73 provinces.¹

The report also noted a CPP membership of around 30,000, with the party and its guerillas controlling or contesting control over settlements inhabited by at least 10 million people. "The military initiative clearly rests with the NPA."² The US figures may be a little exaggerated, either out of a sense of panic or in order to increase political pressure to win more funding for the Philippine military. But they give a clear indication that the party's star was rising.

¹ "The Philippines: A Situation Report", staff report to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, US Senate, November 1, 1985, *The Philippines Reader: A History of Colonialism, Neocolonialism, Dictatorship and Resistance*, Daniel B. Schirmer and Stephen Roskamm Shalom, eds., Quezon City: KEN Incorporated, 1987, p 316.

² Ibid, p 315.

Yet less than four months after that report was presented, the CPP was, by its own admission, effectively marginalised as "people power" or the "EDSA revolution" helped bring down the Marcos regime. While it remained (and probably remains at time of writing) the dominant force on the Philippine Left and its essential point of reference, the party's influence began to enter a long, slow, albeit punctuated decline. In retrospect, the party never recovered its momentum, struggling to come to terms with the new government of Cory Aquino, losing some high-profile defectors and entering into a period of acrimonious and ultimately destructive internal debate.

This chapter aims to explore the underlying reasons why the CPP could suffer such a profound setback. The story of EDSA and associated mobilisations and protests has been told over and again in an extensive literature and does not directly concern us here. But it is difficult to make sense of the inner-party arguments without some feel for the course of events, and therefore the chapter begins with a brief chronological overview of the period.

I shall then turn to a discussion of the CPP's relationship with EDSA, focusing on two initial questions. The first is to ask what was the level of support or involvement for the demonstrations among a) CPP members and close supporters and b) among workers in Metro Manila in general. The answer will help determine whether the CPP could have seized the initiative in February 1986, and under what circumstances.

The second question is whether the party was right to campaign for a boycott of the February 1986 "snap election". To make sense of the confusion which the boycott decision caused, and the relative ease with which it was reversed shortly after EDSA, means examining two further questions – the CPP's position on the "progressive" sections of the bourgeoisie, and its position on parliamentary elections and participation in bourgeois governments.

An understanding of these points has implications for much more than the February 1986 elections, as it should help explain why, as the 1980s wore on, some sections of the NPA could defect or lay down their arms, while sections of the CPP could be pulled further and further towards an electoralist position.

I will argue that the party's failure to take advantage of the events of 1986 did not flow from its election boycott position but from its central theoretical weakness, namely the refusal to put the possibility of independent working class struggle at the centre of its activities and strategies. I will attempt to show that it was the party's subordination to cross-class politics that marginalised it

at the precise moment when nearly two decades of collective courage and sacrifice should have allowed it to make a decisive difference in a momentous year.

This will set the scene for the last chapter, in which I shall examine the split itself, outlining the course of events and the debates that emerged, before attempting to bring together the threads of the CPP's decline, against a background of the collapse of international Stalinism and what I argue is a global crisis in guerillaism.

YEARS OF TURMOIL

PRESIDENT FERDINAND Marcos lifted martial law on January 17, 1981. The national democratic-influenced urban mass movement was undoubtedly a factor. The decision was also aimed to placate the Church, the US administration and the World Bank. Pope John Paul II was due to visit a month later, President Ronald Reagan was being sworn in, and the World Bank's Philippine Consultative Committee was preparing to meet. The lifting of martial law was, therefore, "a brilliant but cosmetic move".³ The decision made little difference on the ground, with Marcos "winning" the rigged June 1981 presidential election and retaining the power to detain any person suspected of subversion or rebellion.

It was to be another two years before the depth of many people's bitterness and frustration became clear. On August 21, 1983, Senator Benigno "Ninoy" S. Aquino – Marcos's most dangerous mainstream opponent – returned from exile and was gunned down at Manila international airport by the military before his feet had reached the tarmac. According to some estimates, close to two million attended his funeral.

Open defiance of the regime, especially in Metro Manila, increasingly became the norm from then on. The anger was reflected in substantial gains for opposition parties in National Assembly elections in 1984. In May 1985, the broad opposition founded BAYAN as an umbrella group that would link everyone from the national democratic movement through to liberals. Its success as a broad grouping was short-lived, however, and it was quickly reduced to a national democratic coalition.

³ Emmanuel S. de Dios, "The Erosion of the Dictatorship", *Dictatorship and Revolution: Roots of People's Power*, Aurora Javate-de Dios, Petronilo Bn. Daroy and Lorna Kalaw-Tirol, eds., Manila: Conspectus, 1988, p 78.

In a desperate attempt to reassert his waning authority, President Marcos called a "snap" presidential election for February 7, 1986. He had clearly misunderstood the popular mood – the economy was worsening, his prestige was slipping as he spent more time in Malacanang because of kidney problems, and his decision to pardon the military men accused of Aquino's murder proved a final straw for many. It took flagrant electoral fraud for Marcos to declare himself the winner against the only other candidate, Aquino's widow, Corazon "Cory" Aquino. The CPP called for a boycott of the election.

With Marcos's "victory" jeered on all sides, Aquino called a protest rally in central Manila which attracted between one and two million. With the movement clearly on the rise, and with the national democratic-influenced unions planning a general strike, the Reform the Armed Forces of the Philippines Movement (RAM), consisting of disaffected but anti-communist military officers, activated plans for a coup to bring Marcos down and head off a mass radicalisation that they feared would benefit only the CPP.

When Marcos's Chief of Staff and most trusted aide General Fabian Ver found out about the coup, he moved to arrest the main plotters, along with their backers – Defence Minister Juan Ponce Enrile and deputy Chief of Staff General Fidel "Eddie" Ramos. As they took refuge on February 22 in Camp Aguinaldo, on the Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA), Cardinal Sin appealed on radio for people to help the mutineers. Up to two million heeded the call, forming a human barricade which prevented Ver's men from confronting the rebels. On February 25 both presidential candidates were sworn into office, but Marcos fled Malacanang that night, en route to the US.

The new Aquino government released all political prisoners, including Jose Maria Sison. On August 5, government representatives began ceasefire talks with National Democratic Front (NDF) representatives, with the ceasefire formally beginning on December 8. By that stage a right-wing military coup attempt had failed – the first of several in the four years of President Aquino's term.

Then, under pressure from the Right and from business to prove her anti-communist credentials, Aquino began to turn on the Left. On January 22, 1987, at least 18 people were shot dead at Mendiola bridge, near Malacanang, when government forces dispersed a peasant demonstration led by the national democratic organisation Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP). On

February 11, with her new constitution recently confirmed by referendum, Aquino declared "Total War" on the CPP and NPA.

The president's Lakas ng Bansa party won 22 out of 24 senatorial seats in the May 11 elections. But her position remained perilous, with a CPP-influenced *welgang bayan* over oil price rises paralysing Metro Manila on August 17 and a further RAM military coup attempt just 11 days later. In the end, however, Aquino's presidency was to survive all challenges from both the Left and Right.⁴

EDSA – THE PIVOTAL MOMENT

The peripheral party

IT WOULD be hard to overestimate the importance of EDSA. It was far and away the most significant urban political mobilisation in the country's history, making up for its lack of leftwing militancy compared to the First Quarter Storm with sheer weight of numbers. It demonstrated decisively the central role of Metro Manila in the life of the archipelago. While there were parallel mobilisations elsewhere, they were dwarfed in size and importance.⁵

There is broad agreement that while the national democratic movement (and by extension the CPP) participated in the EDSA events, it did so in a supporting role. The initiative to mobilise people outside Camp Aguinaldo came from those who were anti-Marcos liberals at best.

People Power began as a rather pitiful little display. As Ramos and Enrile ended their defiant press conference inside Defense Ministry headquarters at Camp Aguinaldo ... the

⁴ Literature covering this period includes: Raymond Bonner, *Waltzing With a Dictator: The Marcoses and the Making of American Policy*, Manila: Times Books, 1987; Sandra Burton, *Impossible Dream: The Marcoses, the Aquinos, and the Unfinished Revolution*, New York: Warner Books, 1989; Isabelo T. Crisostomo, *Cory: Profile of a President: The Historic Rise to Power of Corazon Cojuangco Aquino*, Selangor: Pelanduk Publications, 1987; Bryan Johnson, *The Four Days of Courage: The Untold Story of the People Who Brought Marcos Down*, New York: The Free Press, 1987; Max R. Lane, *The Urban Mass Movement in the Philippines, 1983-87*, Canberra: Australian National University, 1990; John Lyons and Karl Wilson, *Marcos and Beyond: The Philippines Revolution*, Sydney: Kangaroo Press, 1987; Bach M. Macaraya, *Workers' Participation in the Philippine People Power Revolution: An Examination of the Roles Played by Trade Unions in the Philippine "People Power" Revolution*, Manila: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 1988; Antonia Lumicao Santos and Lorna Domingo-Robes, *Power Politics in the Philippines: The Fall of Marcos*, Published 1987. No other publication details.

⁵ Jose Maria Sison with Rainer Werning, *The Philippine Revolution: The Leader's View*, New York: Crane Russak, 1989, p 122.

area was devoid of people. Ramos told his deputies they were going to need some protection. The daughter of General Hermilio Ahorro, deputy director general of the Philippine Constabulary, had called her father to volunteer the services of some activist friends. When Ahorro informed Ramos of her offer, the general had asked, "How many?". He frowned at the answer. "About sixty, sir." Exclaimed Ramos, "I need a million!" But he did not refuse. "Bring them over," he said.⁶

Agapito "Butz" Aquino, Cory's brother-in-law, asked friendly journalists to spread the word among political leaders. When he arrived at the assembly point at 11 pm he found just six people. It was clearly the religious radio broadcasts that made the difference (see the evidence presented by Pinches below): by 1.30 am, about 20,000 people were at the camp gates.⁷ The numbers grew from there to anywhere between one and two million. The leading role played both on the airwaves and on the ground by the Catholic Church meant that the crowd was *politically* dominated by the religious and the moderate middle class – the core supporters of the Aquino campaign.

Sison has defended the national democratic forces, organised primarily through the umbrella group BAYAN, from accusations that they did not participate in EDSA. But he is hazy in attributing any particular role to national democratic supporters outside Aguinaldo, despite claiming that they made up much of the 20 per cent of the crowd that could be regarded as "progressive" or organised.⁸ It is only when it comes to smaller and later mobilisations, especially those around Malacanang as Marcos prepared to flee, that he is prepared to make specific claims.

There can be no denying that more than 90 percent of the people who surrounded Malacanang Palace and the Malacanang Park came from the member-organizations of BAYAN, especially Kilusang Mayo Uno, League of Filipino Students, KADENA and so on. It was also more than 500 members of the Quezon City chapter of BAYAN who stormed Channel 4 (the government radio-TV station) at a crucial moment.⁹

Notwithstanding these latter examples, it seems clear that the CPP was marginal to the events which signalled the denouement of Marcos. After more than 17 years of struggle, both legal and

⁶ Burton, *op cit*, p 387.

⁷ *Ibid*, p 388.

⁸ Kathleen Weekley, "Jose Maria Sison: Talks on Parliamentary Struggle, Inner Party Rectification, Peace Talks, Gorbachevism in the Philippines, and the Future of the National Democratic Movement", *Kasarinlan* 8 no. 2, 1992, p 74.

⁹ Sison and Werning, *op cit*, p 122.

illegal, the party saw its principal enemy toppled by means quite different from those for which it had argued.

What of the workers?

DESPITE THE size of the crowds outside Aguinaldo, most people regard the urban working class as having played little part, or at least little organised part, during those tumultuous days.

Nationalist historian Renato Constantino senior, defining EDSA as a middle-class movement supporting the military, was quite dismissive of any idea that the working class had played a role. He told how he had moved around the city and observed the way life went on, with people going to the cinema or playing basketball as if nothing was happening.¹⁰ Former NDF and party leader Satur Ocampo tended to agree: "There were, of course, representatives of the urban poor and the revolutionaries, but they were marginalised."¹¹

Max Lane, in his monograph on the urban mass movement through this period, devotes only a few lines to workers' participation in EDSA, noting: "[T]he great majority of people, even those from BAYAN, BANDILA, KAAKBAY and traditional party supporters, made their own way to mobilizations outside the two major military camps on the highway EDSA. The level of organization that groups such as BANDILA were able to bring to these huge mobilizations was very limited."¹² (See below for more about these various groupings.)

Bach Macaraya says that trade union members played an active part in all the protest movements following the Aquino assassination in 1983 – including the "yellow confetti" protests in the financial centre, Makati, regular demonstrations called by moderate opposition forces, and EDSA. But he argues that most workers took part despite their unions, rather than because of them (not least because many moderate union leaders supported Marcos, and the KMU supported electoral boycotts in 1984 and 1986).

Workers' contribution in the success of the [EDSA] revolution was very important. They provided the necessary manpower to assure its success. But their participation was

¹⁰ Interview with author, Quezon City, June 25, 1991.

¹¹ Interview with author, Quezon City, June 28, 1993.

¹² Lane, *op cit*, p 19. BANDILA was the *Bansang Nagakaisa sa Diwa at Layunin* (A Nation United in Thought and Purpose), a social democratic umbrella group heavily influenced by Butz Aquino, *ibid*, p 6. KAAKBAY was the *Kilusan sa Kapangyarihan at Karapatan ng Bayan* (Movement for People's Sovereignty and Democracy), a nationalist liberal democratic grouping formed by Senator Diokno and others, *ibid*, p 11.

generally spontaneous or that their mobilization was made outside the structures of trade unions [sic].¹³

Fieldwork carried out by Alex Bello Brillantes, Jr, and Michael Pinches in urban working-class communities in Metro Manila shows a contradictory pattern. Brillantes, interviewing people living in Barrio Magdaragat ("Smokey Mountain"), could find only one young man who attended the EDSA protests. His reason for making the 30 kilometres journey was simply: "Naki-usyoso lang ako" (I was just curious to see what was going on).¹⁴

Pinches, on the other hand, records a high level of participation at EDSA among residents of what is known as the Visayan sub-section of Tatalon, a squatter community of 20,000.

... I estimate that the majority of the youth in the community and a high proportion of the men joined the crowds that flocked to EDSA. Some said they responded directly to the call of Cardinal Sin, head of the Catholic Church, and a great many said they would not have gone had it not been for this directive and the large presence of nuns and priests. This was not, however, the sole reason for participating. Many said they went out of curiosity, or because their friends or relatives were going, or simply because "everyone was there".¹⁵

What was the difference between the two communities, neither of which had any significant organised national democratic presence?¹⁶ The residents of Magdaragat were far from apathetic, having participated in protests and demonstrations concerning matters that directly affected them, like housing policy, and having travelled on occasions much further than the distance to EDSA to do so. But they were highly estranged from national politics. Only 23 per cent of the community voted in the snap election, with many expressing opinions along the lines of: "They couldn't care less about the elections because they knew that Marcos will win anyway. He will cheat. Besides, they need to make a living."¹⁷

¹³ Macaraya, op cit, pp 36-52.

¹⁴ Alex Bello Brillantes, Jr, "National Politics Viewed from Smokey Mountain", *From Marcos to Aquino: Local Perspectives on Political Transition in the Philippines*, Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet and Resil B. Mojares, eds., Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1992, p 200.

¹⁵ Michael Pinches, *ibid*, p 172.

¹⁶ Kerkvliet and Mojares, op cit, p 2.

¹⁷ Brillantes, op cit, pp 198-201.

On the other hand, Pinches records a high level of enthusiasm and active support for the Aquino campaign in Tatalon, which would go a long way towards explaining a greater degree of outrage at the rigged result and a greater willingness to participate in the demonstrations that followed. It seems that residents in Tatalon were much more integrated into national political debates than their counterparts in Magdaragat. One explanation for this could be that while the residents on Smokey Mountain were heavily reliant on garbage recycling, Tatalon residents were part of the Metro Manila waged economy and therefore exposed to broader political debates.¹⁸

If this reading is correct, it does not reflect well on the CPP's level of systematic educational work among the urban working class. Where the poor were at their most degraded, they abstained from mainstream politics out of despair and disinterest rather than because of the national democratic call for a boycott;¹⁹ where workers were at least partially integrated into the waged economy, they turned to Aquino and the Church for earthly salvation.

There appear to be three conclusions that we can draw from all this. First, that the working class was either passive in the face of EDSA, or where it participated, largely subordinated to the political agenda of the middle class. Second, that while the CPP's status may have been high among many Manila workers and students, it had not carried the critical argument that mainstream, bourgeois politicians could not be trusted. (I will explore below how the party contributed to that weakness by itself being prepared to flirt with just such politicians.) Third, that such a conjuncture meant that the CPP would have had difficulty making a decisive intervention into EDSA to tip it into a different channel, even if it had had such a clear objective.

To understand why this should be the case, it is necessary to understand the years of political confusion bred by the party's line. An approach that put the working class at the centre of politics as subjects, rather than at the theoretical periphery, might have paved the way for a different outcome. But the damage inflicted by the CPP's theoretical position could not be healed in the few days of EDSA, and as we shall see below, it was a confusion that no one in the party seemed to be able to overcome.

¹⁸ Michael Pinches, "All that we have is our muscle and sweat": The Rise of Wage Labor in a Manila Squatter Community", *Wage Labor and Social Change: The Proletariat in Asia and the Pacific*, Michael Pinches and Salim Lakha, eds., Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1992.

¹⁹ Once Marcos was gone and there seemed to be the chance of clean elections, the participation rate in Smokey Mountain shot up. In February 1986 it was 23 per cent; in February 1987 (the constitutional plebiscite) it was 82 per cent. Brillantes, *op cit*, p 205.

THE BOYCOTT CONTROVERSY – TO B OR NOT TO B

IN THE aftermath of EDSA, the party bitterly criticised itself for calling for a boycott of the snap elections. The Central Committee summed up the assessment as follows:

For more than 17 of the 20 years that the Marcos fascist puppet regime was in power, the Communist Party of the Philippines ... had played a leading role in our people's ... struggles.

... Yet, where the people saw in the February 7 snap presidential election a chance to deliver a crippling blow on the Marcos regime, a memorandum by the Executive Committee of the Party Central Committee (EC-CC) saw it merely as "a noisy and empty political battle" among factions in the ruling classes.

And when the aroused and militant people moved spontaneously but resolutely to oust the hated regime last February 22-25, the Party and its forces were not there to lead them ... This was because of the Party's official policy enunciated by the EC-CC to launch an active and vigorous boycott campaign ... A recent assessment conducted by the Political Bureau (Politburo) of the Central Committee characterized the boycott policy as a major political blunder.²⁰

As we saw in the previous chapter, the question of boycott had already produced a sharp argument in the party, in Metro Manila in 1978. The victory in that debate by the pro-boycott national leadership seemed to settle the matter, with the party also calling for a boycott of the rigged June 1981 presidential poll and of the May 1984 Batasang Pambansa (National Assembly) elections.

In doing so, the party was in step with much of the Left and even many in the mainstream. Flagrant rewriting of the rules for the holding of the 1981 presidential election forced the most prominent opposition leaders, "Ninoy" Aquino, Lorenzo Tanada, and Salvador Laurel, to support a boycott, which was supported by a wide variety of organisations and by militant church

²⁰ Central Committee of the CPP, "Party Conducts Assessment, Says Boycott Policy Was Wrong", *Ang Bayan*, May 1986, quoted in Schirmer and Shalom, op cit, pp 383-384.

organisations.²¹ In the wake of the Aquino assassination and the rebirth of open dissent, the opposition became bolder. In January 1984, 5000 delegates from all the above-ground anti-Marcos forces attended the Filipino People's Congress (KOMPIL).

The main outcome of the congress was the issuance of a "Call for Meaningful Elections" ... This statement indicated that the opposition forces would not participate in the 1984 elections unless Marcos relinquished his powers to issue legislation by decree and to veto legislation passed by the Batasang Pambansa ... When Marcos refused to accept these conditions the majority of the opposition declared a boycott.²²

In both cases, the only oppositionists to break ranks were from the right of the bourgeois mainstream – in 1981 Jose Roy's Nacionalista Party, in 1984 Salvador Laurel's UNIDO party. The situation was quite different, however, by 1986, with all the mainstream parties sensing the opportunity of victory behind the single candidature of "Cory" Aquino and the non-national democratic Left agreeing. The social democratic umbrella group BANDILA, which consisted largely of organisations that had walked out of the May 1985 founding conference of the national democratic-dominated coalition BAYAN, declared for the Aquino campaign. Later, some of its main players, like "Butz" Aquino, were to become members of her administration.

Another grouping, KAAKBAY, which brought together liberal democrats like Senator Diokno and non-aligned radicals, was formally much closer to national democratic politics (it later evolving into popular democracy), but declared itself for "critical support" of Aquino. It was joined in this by the Independent Caucus, which included a number of non-CPP or PKP socialists.

This shift into the electoral arena by key players on the Left had its impact in CPP-influenced circles, too. BAYAN had been reduced largely to a national democratic organisation, but it still included a number of independents, like senators Tanada and Padilla. Both were to part company with the coalition as it spent nearly two months in debate before finally declaring for a boycott.²³

It is clear that the debate took that long to conclude because there were significant sections among the national democrats themselves (and therefore presumably among CPP members) who were pulled towards participating in the election process by supporting, however critically, the Aquino campaign. The first step taken by BAYAN was to declare for participation if Marcos met

²¹ de Dios, *op cit*, pp 79-80.

²² Lane, *op cit*, p 8.

a range of drastic conditions. While this was never likely, the second step of approaching the Aquino camp about an agreement on a platform could be seen as much more viable. While Aquino refused the national democrats' advances, it appears there were those in BAYAN who thought, and hoped, that agreement was possible.

The party was clearly theoretically under-prepared for the shift in popular mood. With free elections simply inconceivable after 1972, arguing for a boycott (notwithstanding the 1978 episode) had been an easy option for most CPP members. But now, in 1986, they were suddenly having to deal with a situation where the soft Left was engaging genuinely and enthusiastically with the election. Although the CPP journal *Ang Bayan* campaigned for the boycott in its December 1985 issue, it had to acknowledge the turmoil in party and party-influenced ranks.

... although convinced that a boycott is correct and conforms to principles and morality, many anti-fascists and progressives amongst the middle forces are worried that by boycotting they may be isolating themselves from the people. Because of this, a substantial number of them have opted for participation while the rest stand for boycott ... Temporarily, there have also been doubts in the ranks of the progressive mass organizations and alliances. While there is unity that this scheme of the regime [i.e., the elections] should be exposed and opposed, there was no initial agreement on how to carry this out. Spirited democratic discussions were given free reign [sic] within the ranks, including those of Party organs and units.²⁴

This entire process – boycott declaration from the EC-CC, debate within, and fracturing of, the national democratic umbrella, marginalisation during EDSA, and a belated and heated rejection of the boycott decision – was to become a major element in the looming inner-party debate. As we shall see below, “boycott” became an accusatory term thrown primarily by those who favoured an emphasis on urban struggle.

Before dealing with the party tensions, though, let us take a step aside and consider how the CPP got into such confusion.

²³ For an overview of these events, see *ibid*, pp 13-17.

²⁴ Quoted in *ibid*, pp 18-19.

THE FLUID WORLD OF CROSS-CLASS ALLIANCES

"Anti-Marcos reactionaries" or "Bourgeois reformists"?

AS DISCUSSED in earlier chapters, the CPP's understanding of national democratic revolution as a step towards the industrialisation of the Philippines meant that, while proclaiming the nominal leading role of the working class, it was open to collaboration with what it deemed the national bourgeoisie. This raised the problem of how, in practice, such collaboration could be brought about. As noted in Chapter Two and Chapter Four, the concept of alliance has remained essentially unrealised in the economic field.

But in the political field, the question is quite different. The CPP has no monopoly on nationalism. Those who played a prominent role in promoting a modern, bourgeois version of nationalism included senators Tanada, Diokno and Aquino. How exactly should the average party member know how to differentiate between the national bourgeoisie and nationalist, but more rightwing, bourgeois figures? How should the party as a whole relate to those rightwing landlords and employers prepared to oppose Malacanang?

As noted in the previous chapter, those associated with the "fast track" or pol-mil approach began to use the term "bourgeois reformists" to label those ruling class figures prepared to deal with the Left against Marcos. Up until that point, the party's normal terminology had been "anti-Marcos reactionaries". However, according to Sison, attempts to revise the terminology went back as far as a plenum held in 1975.

[T]here was a proposal to do away with the expression anti-Marcos reactionaries. That was a very precise expression for people like Ninoy Aquino ... these bourgeois politicians. The argument for removing that expression is that, people like Tanada ... feel referred to -- it hurts their sensibilities. These are guys who are big lawyers and who own, especially the old man Tanada, a substantial amount of land. So by one record he's a landlord. He's a big lawyer. But in his political standing he has been anti-imperialist, so he takes the viewpoint of the national bourgeois on economic matters and, on the question of democratic rights, even takes the viewpoint of the petit bourgeois civil libertarian. So these are good fellows who are not as reactionary as Ninoy Aquino ...

So that was an accurate expression to make the party alert to the anti-Marcos reactionaries even as you would ally with them informally – because they would never agree to a formal alliance. And that may even be good that there's no formal alliance.

Then there would be very strict classification of people like bourgeois reformist. It's alright for the Bolsheviks to identify the Mensheviks as bourgeois reformist, but the bourgeois reformist as an expression sort of replaced the expression anti-Marcos reactionaries, but it covered forces so widely that there is no more classification of the anti-Marcos reactionaries from those reactionaries but who could be allies for a longer stretch of time. And there was a dulling of the political sense.²⁵

The tension around the terms (and the political strategies that lay beneath them) continued. In the pre-split debate, the Sison wing of the party used the shift in terminology to berate its opponents and accuse them of "going soft".

When we have reactionary allies, we must describe them as such to the Party rank and file and explain to them that these are unstable and unreliable allies so that there can be no confusion. We must neither lump them together with the petty bourgeoisie and the middle bourgeoisie under the category of "bourgeois reformists" nor describe any big comprador-landlord political party or regime as "liberal democratic". Errors have occurred in this regard.²⁶

The problem is that the CPP's core political strategy of collaboration with sections of the bourgeoisie builds confusion into the question from the start. As I discussed in Chapter One, the CPP was founded around a Stalinist conception of cross-class alliances with nationalist employers that flowed from a conception of the coming revolution as national democratic, rather than socialist. While those who were to split from the party were anxious to dissociate themselves from Stalinism, their main objection was to a top-down, dictatorial leadership style rather than the CPP's strategic outlook. (I shall examine this further in Chapter Eight.) Collaboration with sections of the employing class seems never to have been contested among CPP members.

²⁵ Interview with author, Utrecht, July 8, 1993.

²⁶ CPP Central Committee, "Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Carry the Revolution Forward", statement issued on December 26, 1991, to mark the 23rd anniversary of the party, *Rebolusyon 1*, Luzon: Central Publishing House, 1992, pp 11-12.

The result of this original strategic orientation was that both embryonic wings of the party shared a common confusion on precisely how far the CPP could venture down the road towards electoral participation and electoral alliances before it crossed that invisible frontier between "revolutionary and armed" and "reformist, electoralist and unarmed". So the Central Committee document, quoted two paragraphs above, itself muddled the waters. While berating its factional opponents, it also argued that the party should continue to be open to alliances with reactionaries: "To take advantage of the splits among the reactionaries is to be able to isolate and defeat the most reactionary faction at a given time."²⁷

Which reactionaries could be allies, and at what time? It seems no one in the CPP could stand on solid theoretical ground while answering that one. But the question of how to relate to the Aquino presidential campaign and her subsequent presidency demanded an answer. The party's founding strategy of building cross-class alliances to isolate the "compradors" and the "bureaucrat capitalists" meant the answer was messy.

So, first, the NDF declared a Marcos victory in the February poll a "foregone conclusion" (because of government fraud), thus sidestepping the question of whether or how far to support his electoral opponent.²⁸ Then Sison, interviewed by *National Midweek* in his prison cell in Manila on December 26, 1985, argued for a "minimum boycott", meaning indirect support for the Aquino ticket while refusing to formally endorse it. "The unity of the Opposition political parties and the enthusiasm of the people for the Opposition ticket are very encouraging," he said, adding: "To me personally, the Opposition tandem of Aquino and Laurel is far, far better and more acceptable."²⁹

The following month, BAYAN, which was widely understood to be expressing the position of the CPP, argued for boycott in "maximum" terms.

Boycott expresses the people's determination to struggle against the US-backed Marcos dictatorship, relying not on sham elections, but persevering mainly in direct combative forms of mass struggle.

²⁷ Ibid, p 11.

²⁸ NDF, "Snap Elections Cannot End the US-Marcos Dictatorship; Neither Will They Ease the Sufferings of the People", Manila, November 11, 1985, Javate-de Dios, et al, op cit, pp 681-682.

²⁹ Ibid, pp 685-689.

If we have to go against the tide in this particular struggle, so be it. But the course of history shall eventually vindicate our principled position.

Freedom and democracy are not won through sham electoral contests but through actual battles between the mighty force of a united people and the forces of oppression.³⁰

What of Aquino herself? For the CPP, "well-meaning though she may be, she is either politically naive or she has not transcended her own comprador-landlord class background".³¹ Yet the party's rank-and-file membership and supporters proved all too able to suspend their judgement of Aquino – a member of one of the biggest land-owning dynasties in the country – and enthusiastically rally to her cause. If they had any pangs of political conscience, they were quickly swept away as the party leadership retrospectively abjured the boycott. Aquino's status was further lifted by the national democratic movement when the KMU agreed to cooperate with the government in organising the 1986 May Day rally. Aquino was guest of honour as a vast crowd of workers and peasants sang the *Internationale*.³²

The CPP's political heritage meant that it zigzagged from hostility to cautious endorsement to relatively enthusiastic cooperation to, within a year, fierce, renewed warfare against Aquino. If the party leadership could not cope with the question of its relationship to the so-called progressive sections of the bourgeoisie, little wonder that the ordinary supporter could be drawn in uncritically behind the Aquino bandwagon. As we shall see later, the split would prove to be no real help in clarifying this messy theoretical situation.

Elections: a vote for confusion

IF GUIDELINES on how to relate to potential bourgeois allies are tangled, the CPP's line on elections could be described as heavily knotted. On the one hand, the party's orthodox argument is that fair, democratic parliamentary elections in the Philippines are impossible. While the CPP remains illegal, the question of its involvement is in any case academic. As Sison puts it:

³⁰ BAYAN, "Persevere in Correct Struggles, Boycott the Sham Snap Elections", Manila, January 1986, *ibid*, pp 683-685.

³¹ Quoted in Gemma N. Almendral, "The Fall of the Regime", *ibid*, p 194.

³² Sison and Werning, *op cit*, p 134.

The elections being held in the Philippines are an operation, are a systematic procedure controlled by the comprador big bourgeoisie and the landlord class ...

Let's take the national elections, which can produce an Aquino type or a Ramos type. Or even a Marcos type in the past. That is rotten. That is a fraud. Genuine representatives of the working class and the peasantry are excluded a long time before such an election is held. They are excluded by intelligence, coverage and by harassment by the intelligence agencies. Then you have the cutting down of the genuine figures, either by attack in the media or ... they are simply ignored.³³

Yet on the other hand (just minutes later within the same interview) Sison is prepared to concede that there can be a usefulness in intervening in elections.

There is that situation where you can choose which candidate [wins] in certain localities, and even certain congressional districts and if the electoral skills of the special unit assigned to handle the elections [are enough], probably even the position of governor can be decided by the swing power of the movement. For instance, if you control a number of towns with the proper combination you can decide who will come out as governor.³⁴

The contradictions are compounded by the party's record over time. Omar Tupaz argues that electoral struggle was seen as a "right opportunist error" committed by the PKP once it had abandoned armed struggle.

In early documents, elections were seen as being "nothing more than a legal mechanism to facilitate the replacement of one ruling exploiter with another" ... *Rebolusyon, hindi eleksyon!* (Revolution, not election!) became the regular slogan come election time.³⁵

Yet, in what Tupaz called an "adjustment", the CPP adopted a different posture after 1986, with its legal democratic organisations participating in the 1987 congressional elections and the 1988 local elections, although still regarding electoral activity as secondary.³⁶

³³ Interview, op cit.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Omar Tupaz, "Towards a Revolutionary Strategy of the 90s", *Debate* 1, 1991, p 8. Tupaz's identity was discussed in the previous chapter.

³⁶ Ibid, p 11.

It would be tempting to regard the first (boycott) position as belonging to the orthodox, Sison, camp and the second to the "fast track" faction. But the underlying strategic confusion meant that both groups could swing between the two electoral poles.

So the party's Executive Committee could write in 1991 – at a time when it was fiercely opposed to the "fast track" faction – that "the reactionaries will make certain that the [1992] elections will not become a truly free national debate" and in the same document urge party sections to help form a legal party, formulate a party platform and choose candidates.³⁷ On the other hand, Tupaz, while arguing for the acceptance of a "politico-military" strategy, argues that the orthodox approach of containing urban work to legal channels is too narrow.³⁸

The CPP's twisting and turning on the relationship between revolutionaries and elections is not a matter of episodic mistakes and corrections. A strategy of national democratic revolution undercuts the party's ability or willingness to make consistent arguments to its supporters about the need for workers to organise in their own interests, separately from so-called progressive sections of their exploiters. When a mainstream candidate succeeds in mobilising mass support for their campaign – as Aquino did – the party is left with two unpalatable choices: isolating itself from its uncomprehending base, or tailing politicians who could turn on it at any time. The CPP did both in the course of 1986.

Two episodes illustrate further how the CPP's politics could see it oscillate rapidly between fierce and uncompromising opposition to the prevailing system and participation.

1) Democratic space and coalition hopes

THE FALL of the Marcos regime led to discussion about the circumstances under which the party could consider entering a coalition government. What underpinned this was the idea that Aquino's victory had opened up a "democratic space" that could be used by communists.

The idea of the CPP entering a coalition government had been floated briefly much earlier. Rocamora argues that the possibility of coalition work emerged out of the growing success of the

³⁷ "Regarding the 1992 Reactionary Elections: Memorandum of the Executive Committee of the Central Committee to the Party's leading commissions and committees from the national to the provincial levels, May 10, 1991", *Rebolusyon* 1, Luzon: Central Publishing House, 1992, p 39 and pp 44-45.

³⁸ Tupaz, *op cit*, p 23.

NDF. "While this concept was developed mainly for the anti-dictatorship struggle, it was anchored on what, from the CPP's point of view, was an audacious idea – the possibility of an intermediate step in the national democratic revolution where the NDF would participate in a post-Marcos government as a minority partner. This proposal was set aside in the general thrust towards Party orthodoxy ..."³⁹

Although Rocamora does not spell it out, it seems clear that the coalition idea was being pushed by those sympathetic to the "fast track" wing of the party. In the post-EDSA period, with the orthodox party leadership's reputation severely undermined by the boycott debate, the idea resurfaced, presumably pushed by the same sort of people.

The party leadership had reasserted orthodoxy in 1985. It did so again in late 1986 and into 1987, arguing once more the centrality of the party in the revolutionary process. Democratic space was a mirage, it said, that could be whipped away at any time by the Aquino regime. The peace talks were a fraud, designed to weaken the national democratic movement and win "total capitulation" by the party and the NPA.⁴⁰

Once again, it would be tempting to see a clear, lasting demarcation between the two emerging wings of the party. But such a demarcation was temporary and fuzzy at best. Both sides accepted that socialism was not on the agenda, and that the best that could be achieved was national democratic revolution, for which middle and upper class cooperation was necessary. Both sides had gone along with the analysis of Marcos as a fascist, implying that Aquino could only be qualitatively better. Neither side looked to the independent action of workers themselves as an alternative to Marcos *and* Aquino.

Sison, supposedly the guarantor of orthodoxy, was even quoted as saying:

If Mrs Aquino can keep expanding the democratic space, then a point might be reached when the Communist Party would consider shifting from armed struggle to parliamentary struggle. If Mrs Aquino takes the lead in asserting Philippine sovereignty – just let Mrs Aquino take out the American bases and distribute land to the peasants – then what would be the use of armed struggle? She would be doing what the Communist Party wants.⁴¹

³⁹ Joel Rocamora, *Breaking Through: The Struggle Within the Communist Party of the Philippines*, Manila: Anvil, 1994, p 146.

⁴⁰ Ibid, pp 79-83.

⁴¹ Lyons and Wilson, *op cit*, p 95.

And he wrote elsewhere:

If the objective of the Aquino government is to achieve the best possible situation for the Filipino people, then it should be ready to negotiate not only for a temporary ceasefire but a lasting ceasefire in connection with the formation of a coalition government. The revolutionary forces led by the CPP can be one more major part of a new coalition government, which may continue to include the [centre/centre-right parties] UNIDO, Laban ng Bayan and the Enrile-Ramos-RAM bloc.⁴²

Sison no doubt thought he was being ironic, knowing full well that President Aquino could not deliver what he was demanding. But would every party member and supporter appreciate the nuances? Not surprisingly, given such a mix of signals, the party vacillated. Under the impact of the EDSA events, and doubtless in deference to the popularity of the Aquino regime among the national democratic movement's mass base, the party Political Bureau declared its "critical support" for Aquino's government. In August 1986, the superior Executive Committee reversed this decision, retrospectively labelling the government a US-Aquino regime from February.⁴³ Despite this, the party persevered with peace talks, and the KMU and KMP cooperated with the relevant government ministers.

But if those in the party who were in favour of using the "democratic space" and coexisting with Aquino were hostile to the Executive Committee decision, events quickly whipped the ground out from under their feet. Aquino, under pressure from the military, pushed her more liberal ministers out of the government, placed impossible demands on the NDF peace negotiators, stalled on land reform, tolerated her troops opening fire on peaceful peasant protesters at the "Mendiola Massacre" of January 22, 1987, and finally let loose the military against the CPP. In 1987, the Political Bureau confirmed the EC decision. Aquino had forced a new, albeit temporary, unity on to party cadres.

But the political confusion that underlay the shifts and turns in the party's line still cost it dear. In practice, the CPP had built its mass membership and mass base as the best and most courageous element in the anti-Marcos struggle. For a while – at least until Aquino's declaration of "Total

⁴² Jose Maria Sison, "Questions Concerning the Communist Party of the Philippines", *The Aquino Alternative*, M. Rajaretnam, ed., Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986, pp 62-63.

⁴³ Rocamora, op cit p 86.

War" – some national democratic activists could no longer see the point of continuing an arduous, illegal, armed struggle.

I was in Malacanang when people claimed victory and I thought, thousands of [CPP/NPA] lives were wasted and we [the party] weren't here. It was a real shock. All the time from being a student activist you feel very sure it's the right path to revolution – you could topple Marcos only through shedding blood and the snap election did it with civil disobedience led by nuns.⁴⁴

There were defections, the most prominent of which was by the NPA leader Danie – Bernabe Buscayno.⁴⁵

2) Partido ng Bayan

AS WE have seen, at various points the CPP was prepared to attack participation in elections as a matter of principle, rather than as matter of tactics. In the period after Aquino's victory, however, national democrats took the initiative to establish a legal, electoral party, the Partido ng Bayan (People's Party or PnB). Sison chaired a preparatory commission on August 30 and 31, 1986, which founded the PnB.⁴⁶ The party contested the 1987 national elections, the 1988 local elections and the simultaneous local and national elections in 1992.⁴⁷

In the first two contests in particular, the party, faced with the heightened anti-communist repression of the Total War period, and suffering from a lack of coherence and experience, did much worse than some party members expected.

A glimpse of what this departure [the establishment of the PnB] might accomplish was offered one day in a peasant's home in the hills of Panay where some of the CPP's

⁴⁴ Former CPP member, female, interview with author, Melbourne, November 16, 1997.

⁴⁵ Buscayno argued: "The extreme conditions which prevailed during Marcos time [sic] that pushed many to take to the hills no longer exist. After the coming to power of the Aquino government, after the plebiscite and the elections, and in spite of the unchanged economic and social conditions, the majority of people are opting for a different method to achieve change." Interview with the *Diliman Review*, quoted in Schirmer and Shalom, op cit, p 472.

⁴⁶ Sison and Werning, op cit, p 168

⁴⁷ A thorough overview of this process can be found in Eva-Lotta E. Hedman, "Beyond Boycott: The Philippine Left and Electoral Politics After 1986", *The Revolution Falters: The Left in Philippine Politics After 1986*, Patricio N. Abinales, ed., New York: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1996, pp 83-109.

ranking cadres were taking a week's retreat to evaluate the new politics ... Nene, a member of the CPP district committee on Panay, talked of the communists' hope for seizing local offices throughout the island. NDF front organisations were solidly entrenched in about one third of the 98 towns, she said, and their candidates could easily win control under the banner of Sison's new party.⁴⁸

In practice, nationally, the PnB won two seats in the 1987 congressional elections and 18 municipal seats in 1988. The Alliance for New Politics (ANP) which it had helped form won 1.7 million votes in the 1987 senate race – in mainstream electoral terms, an insignificant result.⁴⁹ The repression the party faced was undoubtedly a factor. A number of its candidates and supporters were killed.⁵⁰

But for our purposes, the most important questions are what the CPP hoped to achieve through the PnB and how its members and supporters understood the exercise. How, in other words, did a party based on an orthodoxy of armed struggle and an official disdain for electoralism cope with an electoral foray?⁵¹ Among the members there was substantial confusion. To return to the passage in Chapman quoted above:

But despite the doubts and reservations, the CPP neared its eighteenth birthday with a strange new cut to its clothing. It [the PnB] was beginning to look, to the dismay of some and the delight of others, like a conventional political party ... The notion of winning power by ballots instead of bullets intrigued Nene ... Playing politics in the conventional sense, she thought, was a wise move under the new circumstances. "It might hasten things a bit," she said. She smiled, and then suddenly bent over in a comic imitation of an aging woman. "Some of us are getting on in years."⁵²

Was an electoral party a clever ruse, an aid to the struggle or a sell-out? There was clearly a debate in party ranks.

⁴⁸ William Chapman, *Inside the Philippine Revolution: The New People's Army and Its Struggle for Power*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1987, p 252.

⁴⁹ Hedman, op cit, p 103.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p 88.

⁵¹ This is another of those areas (like nationalism) where both national democratic activists and Philippine academics seem remarkably silent. Hedman's scholarly account gives an outline of the process and the practical problems the PnB's campaigns created without substantial comment on its rationale or significance. Many writers on the CPP simply do not talk about the PnB. Rene Ciria-Cruz polemicalises for parliamentary activity without mentioning the PnB once, "Why the Philippine Left Must Take the Parliamentary Road", *Debate* 2, 1992, pp 5-15.

Thus identified with – though not identical to – the underground Left, the PnB's electoral agenda was allegedly still considered "secondary" to armed struggle. For example, a key PnB figure and ANP senatorial candidate claimed that the "primary campaign goal was to educate the electorate and to broaden the policy debate". Another prominent PnB personality also admitted "very strong reservations about participating in the 1987 elections". Many PnB insiders, moreover, "noted that their strategists and activists were less than united on the objectives of their participation."⁵³

The confusion in the ranks stems directly from confusion at the top. Sison, on the one hand, stakes a claim for orthodoxy, declaring that: "The voting exercises staged by the U.S.-Aquino regime and their results cannot invalidate the revolutionary armed struggle."⁵⁴ But shortly after he welcomes the establishment of the PnB as relieving "the legal mass organisations and alliances of the burden of having to debate and divide over whether to participate or not in voting exercises and which particular parties or candidates to support".⁵⁵

In my interview with Sison, I asked him several times to explain the role of the PnB in the eyes of the CPP. It proved a next-to-impossible task. Finally, I put it to him bluntly: "It seems to me that the Partido ng Bayan experience indicates that there is a potential at least that the Communist Party wants to have a bet on both horses." His response was as follows:

No, there is no equal weight between trying to build your own army and having agents of your own within the enemy army. There is no contradiction. The principled thing is to build your own. Because if it's not clear to one what to build principally, what to develop principally, then the line of armed revolution for instance could be damaged.⁵⁶

The problem for the CPP was that it rapidly became obvious that a portion of its membership was far from clear on its principal tasks. The party had carved out a political space by denouncing electoralism and the PKP's legal, electoral deficiencies. But its launch of the PnB sounded suspiciously like a pragmatic attempt to use the electoral system, while avoiding another boycott debate and the resurfacing of potentially uncomfortable questions.

⁵² Chapman, *op cit*, pp 252-253.

⁵³ Hedman, *op cit*, p 97.

⁵⁴ Sison and Werning, *op cit*, p 138.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p 169.

⁵⁶ Interview, *op cit*.

It was scarcely surprising, given the party's broader problems, that some members took the PnB experiment at face value and began to put much greater emphasis on electoral intervention. They were encouraged by members of the non-CPP national democratic Left. Rene Ciria-Cruz, a leading member of the Movement for the Advancement of Socialist Ideas and Action (BISIG), argued in a paper entitled *Why the Philippine Left Must Take the Parliamentary Road*, that the CPP faced a crisis that predated the collapse of the Soviet Union, and which was largely the consequence of the return to electoral politics in the Philippines after the Marcos era. In popular consciousness, political change was once again possible through the ballot box (although he conceded that Philippine parliamentary politics at its best was venal, flawed and involved a degree of violence). There was no reason to ask people to risk death to overthrow the government, he argued, concluding:

Thus in order for the CPP to influence popular consciousness and successfully channel mass political activity to a progressively more revolutionary trajectory, it must situate itself as a legitimate force in the midst of popular efforts to secure elite democracy's fundamental promises of democratic reforms, pluralism, a more equitable distribution of wealth, etc. But constitutional democracy cannot be effectively challenged and tested by a force that has no legitimacy because it chooses to operate from the shadows of extraconstitutionality. Under the current circumstances, the CPP has no real option but to wage an open and legal struggle in the mainstream or risk a marginal political existence.⁵⁷

Many oppositionists within the party tended to agree. By 1992, PnB was part of a much greater turn to electoral activity and what Hedman calls the "NGO-isation" of the Philippine Left.⁵⁸ Sison had lost control.

CONCLUSION

AS I HAVE attempted to argue throughout this thesis, the central problem with the CPP's theory is its unwillingness to place the working class at the centre of its politics and its subsequent

⁵⁷ Ciria-Cruz, op cit, p 11.

⁵⁸ Hedman, op cit, pp 100-107.

adoption of cross-class alliances. The events outlined in this chapter would seem to bear out the argument.

The lack of clarity throughout the period under discussion left the party open to conflicting tendencies. It was pulled between abstract scorn of election and the gravitational field of bourgeois politics. It could flip between militant boycottism to participating in elections through a legal surrogate. It could move from hostility to bourgeois figures it deemed reactionary to its supporters giving a May Day platform to one of the biggest landowners in the country.

Its use of nationalism as ideological glue, and its reliance on the Marcos dictatorship to give a "common sense" underpinning to its insistence on illegal, armed politics meant that its "mass base" was poorly prepared for EDSA and the period that followed. The party had to retrospectively shift its boycott position and its hostility to electoral intervention to ensure it maintained contact with its supporters: it was not the leader but the led.

Understood this way, the "boycott error" was not the party's greatest sin – on this, Sison is correct. But his dismissal of those who were to split, the Rejectionists, is not valid. The problem was not whether or not to boycott: it was that *no* element of the party looked to the urban working class as the potential central agent of fundamental change. This weakness left the CPP unable to maintain a consistent position capable of satisfying and cohering its members and supporters. A boycott conducted without the mass independent struggle of the urban workers was worthless; an intervention into the 1986 election on the bandwagon of a daughter of the ruling class was no more worthwhile.

The party had been right to refuse to give electoral support to either of two privileged ruling-class figures. Aquino was no more a friend of workers and peasants than Marcos. Real change was not going to come from an election. But the party had left it there – it combined calls for a boycott with abstention from the struggle.

What was the alternative? A party operating within the classical Marxist tradition would have built on hopes for change under Aquino by arguing for workers to take events into their own hands, to strike, demonstrate and occupy, to insist that whoever won the election, workers and their families were going to fight for higher wages, better conditions and democracy not just in broader society but in the workplace. Indeed, Marcos's fall was greeted by a rash of strikes and pickets.

Such a party could also have called on the landless farm labourers and tenant farmers to seize the plantations and begin sharing the land or running it collectively. But the CPP could not do that because it was stuck within a Stalinist framework that dictated that victory was military and rural, and merely, in any case, a stage in which workers and peasants would have to continue to subordinate their interests to those of their exploiters. The biggest urban political crisis in the post-independence history of the country passed it by.

CHAPTER EIGHT: INTO THE ABYSS

INTRODUCTION

THE HEADLINE in the *Manila Chronicle* on November 22, 1992, read: "Cadres call for ouster of Sison." It was a dramatic public indication of severe tensions within the CPP. Within days, it became clearer still just how bitter the intra-party conflict had become, as leading figures traded verbal blows in the Manila press.

Sison fed the debate with what became known as "fax attacks" from exile in Europe. He claimed that detractors included "long-term intelligence agents and renegades who are recent recruits into the intelligence and psy-war machinery of the US-Ramos regime".¹ In return, former close colleagues condemned the charges as "obviously false and unfair". They argued that "there have been and continue to be intense debates within the revolutionary movement and the Left on fundamental issues such as the crisis of socialism, strategies of action and internal democracy".²

The divisions would have taken some people by surprise. The arguments explored above about the "pol-mil" strategy seemed to have been settled. Similarly, party spokespeople were keen to play down any impact from the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. The CPP had long since distanced itself from the post-Stalin Soviet Union, they argued. And in any case, the special characteristics of the Philippine struggle provided insulation from the stresses and strains elsewhere in the world communist movement.³

¹ Jose Maria Sison, *Statement of Denial and Condemnation*. Photocopied document, December 8, 1992.

² Romulo Kintanar, Ricardo Reyes, Benjamin de Vera, *Reply to Sison's charges*. Photocopy of a letter dated December 11, 1992. For a useful overview of how the bitter process of disintegration took place, see Joel Rocamora, *Breaking Through: The Struggle Within the Communist Party of the Philippines*, Manila: Anvil, 1994, pp 107-138.

³ Satur Ocampo, in a written answer to written questions posed by Australian journalists Richard Evans and Shelley Dempsie, Manila, February 5, 1991, while recognising that the concept of socialism would need further thought, still argued that the general orientation of the CPP was essentially correct.

In reality, the failure of the official Communist movement could not be shrugged off so lightly, as we shall discuss below. And there were further factors putting the party under stress.⁴ The fall of the Marcos regime removed the clear-cut enemy against whom the CPP had mobilised its supporters and membership for well over a decade. Although the failure of ceasefire talks with the government of "Cory" Aquino in early 1987 led to a resumption of conflict between the NPA and the military, Aquino was able to claim a democratic legitimacy Marcos lacked. The CPP lost a further touchstone with the withdrawal by the United States from the Subic and Clark military bases in 1992. The bases, seen by a broad layer of Philippines society as a sign of US domination, had long provided both a concrete and symbolic focus for resistance.

The internal and external stresses inevitably took a toll. As the CPP Central Committee recognised in 1992, the party's mass base fell by almost 60 per cent between 1987 and 1990 (compared to the 1986 figure), the number of townships (barrios) covered by guerilla fronts by 16 per cent, and party membership by 15 per cent.⁵

In mid-1992 the rift was still largely hidden from public view, although oppositional documents were circulating relatively freely among party members in Manila. A year later, the party still seemed to be hanging together. Sison, in remarks made after the conclusion of a formal interview with this author on July 8, 1993, indicated his confidence that Liwanag's (i.e., his) leadership was secure and that the opposition had been marginalised.

But the tensions could not be contained indefinitely. Just two days later, on July 10, 1993, the Manila-Rizal party leadership declared "autonomy", thereby effectively splitting from the CPP with the bulk of its metropolitan membership. Over the next few years the national democratic movement was to divide and divide again. The main Manila rebels have formed a competing trade union centre, and parallel "mass" organisations. Death threats have been issued.⁶ As will be described below, the CPP has been reduced to just one of a range of competing groups, albeit probably one of the largest. The shockwaves which had their epicentre in Berlin, Bucharest and Moscow had finally hit the Philippines.

⁴ Kathleen Weekley identifies four strands within national democratic ranks at the opening of the 1990s, two leaning towards insurrectionism, one endorsing orthodoxy and the fourth operating outside the party but not in opposition to it. *From Vanguard to Rearguard: The Communist Party of the Philippines 1969-1993*. PhD thesis, University of Sydney, August 1996, pp 257-259.

⁵ CPP, "Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors", adopted by the 10th Plenum of the Central Committee, July 1992, *Rebolusyon*, Special Issue 1, 1993, p 37.

⁶ Some appear to have been carried out. "Two Renegade NPA Leaders Executed by Ex-Comrades", *The Manila Times*, June 22, 1993. The report relies, however, on army sources.

To explain this series of events, I will first look at the impact the collapse of the European Stalinist regimes and the Tiananmen Square massacre had on the CPP. I will argue that although many in the party draw the conclusion that Stalinism had to be junked, their own Stalinist political education meant they confused form and content. The result was that they rejected Stalinist methods of organisation but retained many of that tradition's ideas during and after the split.

Second, I will argue that guerillaism as a form of radical struggle has gone into a worldwide and probably irreversible crisis. The roots of this crisis are to be found in both the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and in the pressure of the world market on new or aspiring national leaderships. The CPP is not exempt from such pressures.

Third, this chapter will outline the course of the split, arguing that the CPP's estrangement from independent working class politics provides an important, or at least underplayed, explanation of the events of the 1990s. I will further argue that neither side in the split has come to terms with this Achilles' heel of Philippine radical politics, and that the sterile battle between guerillaism and electoralism is likely to be played out again in the future.

SOVIET DISUNION

IT TOOK some little time for the events in Berlin, Bucharest and Moscow to impact practical politics in Manila, Cebu or Davao, and the relationship between the two crises was for a while denied. In early 1991, Satur Ocampo was dismissive of the consequences for the Philippine Left of the Eastern European events.

Specifically as regards the armed struggle being waged by the CPP-NPA, the collapse of socialist governments in Eastern Europe has not had any immediate impact. The armed struggle proceeds in its normal course ...

As for "rethinking" of ideology, I don't think that this has happened in the case of the CPP, since the general orientation and political program of the revolutionary struggle basically corresponds to the unchanged social and political situation in the country. If any review were being done, I think this would be in terms of concepts and methods by which

to achieve socialism to avoid the errors committed in previous efforts at socialist construction in many countries, starting with the Soviet Union.⁷

Behind the scenes, however, things were not so calm. As the CPP Central Committee admitted in the first issue of its relaunched theoretical journal *Rebolusyon*:

It may be astonishing to some people in the Philippines that certain countries acclaimed as socialist "suddenly" become capitalist. Filipino progressives, including communists, may be flabbergasted that capitalism is touted as the superior choice by the new rulers of these countries, despite the historical and current ravages of capitalism in the Philippines, Latin America and the rest of the underdeveloped third world.⁸

By June 1993 Ocampo's opinion had shifted dramatically.

[I]t is no longer a matter of doubt that the downfall of the so-called socialist states and the Soviet Union has an impact on the local movement. [This is] different from the earlier assessments that because ... the socio-economic and political conditions of the country have not changed ... the events in Eastern Europe would not impact on the direction and growth of the movement here. But we see now that this has had an impact and we cannot ignore the trend for a reassessment of the visions of socialism, or a clarification, towards a higher level of unity of just what is the vision of socialism.⁹

In practice, the events in Eastern Europe were having an impact even in 1991. According to CPP members in Manila in mid-1991, there was substantial disquiet among at least some party members in the capital. While the party's base among the less politically sophisticated peasantry was said to be holding firm, the urban cadres, especially those among the intelligentsia, were reportedly in a degree of turmoil.¹⁰ Other reports indicated that membership of the League of Filipino Students (LFS), a legal organisation heavily influenced by CPP ideas, had fallen sharply, down from between 12,000 and 15,000 to perhaps 6000.¹¹

⁷ Interview by Evans and Dempsie, op cit.

⁸ Central Committee-Executive Committee, CPP, "Lead the Masses, Launch the Offensives", *Rebolusyon* 1, no 1, 1991, p 24.

⁹ Interview with author, Quezon City, June 28, 1993.

¹⁰ Conversations between national democratic activists and the author, Metro Manila, June 1991.

¹¹ Conversations between national democratic activists and Australian solidarity activist Jeff Sparrow, Metro Manila, December 1991.

Why did the crisis take so long to move into the open? There are three reasons. The first is the CPP's intellectual isolation from the mainstream Left debate. The party's heritage lies primarily in the Maoist tradition rather than the pro-Moscow stream. But Beijing has long since ceased to give a political lead to aligned groups abroad. The second is the extent to which the party's cadres genuinely believe that the CPP had created a Filipino strategy to suit Philippine conditions, quite independently of external trends in the international Left. The third is the weakness of party internal democracy, discussed below.

There were, however, several factors that formed a bridge for the external crisis to enter the party.

1) Partial rapprochement with the USSR

REAFFIRM DEVOTES a particularly vitriolic section to denouncing those in the party who softened their criticism of the Soviet Union and of the ruling Communist Party there. The CPP's Maoist roots meant that its orthodoxy demanded criticism of the CPSU as revisionist – meaning that those who ruled after Stalin's death in 1953 had revised Stalin's version of the Marxist project. The argument had added potency in the Philippine context, as the Lava family-led PKP, which had the official USSR "franchise", had made its peace with Marcos in 1974. *Reaffirm* argued:

Since the early 1980s, the deviation from the anti-revisionist line of the Party has been prompted by a desire for rapid military advances, be these the Jose Lava type of quick military victory or the "strategic counteroffensive"-within-the-strategic-defensive type ... [S]ome elements wished to override the preemptive relations between the Lava group and the revisionist ruling parties and even wanted to repudiate the anti-revisionist line of the Party in order to establish "fraternal" relations with these revisionist ruling parties and secure material assistance.¹²

But even the Reaffirmist leadership did not rule out some contact between the CPP and the ruling parties of Eastern Europe. Writing elsewhere, Sison himself was more than willing to put a conciliatory gloss on the CPP's relationship with the then still ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

¹² Armando Liwanag, "Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors", *Kasarinlan* 8, no. 1, 1992, p 92.

The CPP has decided to regard the Soviet Union as a country in the process of building socialism and has ceased to call it social imperialist. The CPP has also ceased to call the CPSU revisionist ... the CPP takes full responsibility for the positions taken in these [former, hostile] articles [in party publications] and is now desirous of sending study and research groups to the Soviet Union.¹³

The important point here is not the extent to which, yet again, the two wings of the party were ready to blur their theoretical differences. (Three years after the comments above were published, Sison identified the ruling parties of the Soviet bloc as "anti-socialist for decades".¹⁴) It is that the party was prepared to link its fortunes, even if tentatively, to the pro-Russian bandwagon. When the wheels fell off, there was an inevitable transmission of crisis back into the CPP.

2) A matter of democracy

FOR MANY party cadres, especially former students and those in urban areas, concerns about the increasingly hierarchical style of CPP inner-party democracy began to mesh with the growing evidence that the revolt in Eastern Europe was being fuelled by a mass desire for democracy. If a system which described itself as socialist was being rejected by the very masses it was meant to benefit, what did it say about either socialism in general, or the way that generations of activists had been taught that it would be imposed and run?

Closer to home, the national democratic movement's initial support for the massacre carried out by the Chinese government in Tiananmen Square in 1989 must have added to activists' concerns. The KMU, for example, issued a media release supporting Beijing's line. As sympathisers overseas made their disgust with the position clear, national democratic organisations shifted their line to one of cautious criticism.¹⁵

One anonymous contribution to the debate in the early 1990s summed up a number of key points that were widely shared among critics of the leadership. He or she called for reviews of the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat; the one-party system; the counterposing of state

¹³ Jose Maria Sison with Rainer Werning, *The Philippine Revolution: The Leader's View*, New York: Crane Russak, 1989, p 183.

¹⁴ Jose Maria Sison, "Capitalist Crisis, Socialism and the Third World", *International Liberation* 4, no. 5, 1992, p 20.

regulation and the market; Marxist ethics; the "socialist world's" economic and technological stagnation; and the idea of the vanguard party. On the last point, the author voiced what was becoming a more and more widely held opinion: "Stalinism has debased this to the point that vanguardship became equal to authoritarian control of the Party minus democracy."¹⁶

The tug-of-war between centralism and federalism, a statised economy and a mixed economy, and the leading role of the CPP and pluralism had, in fact, been taking place in a more muted form for at least a decade. The battleground had been the platform of the National Democratic Front (NDF), which as the CPP's attempt to reach out to "middle forces" was an inherently ambiguous project.

The party issued the first NDF platform on April 24, 1973, and elaborated on its initial ten points on November 12, 1977. A November 1982 redraft, which was never accepted, attempted to tilt the platform away from the prevailing orthodoxy towards pluralism. The leadership responded with a further draft platform, issued in January 1985, which took the balance back towards the 1977 version. Yet another draft, issued in July 1988, moved things back towards the positions of the soon-to-be oppositionists. This draft, which included a shift to a "mixed economy with a socialist perspective", was broadly accepted by the NDF founding congress in July 1990. It raised the ire of the Sison camp, and is still generally defended by those who eventually split from the party.¹⁷

Because the party was the central force in the NDF, shifts in the NDF platform directly reflected shifts in the internal politics of the CPP. Of all the elements in debate, perhaps the most important was whether the party should run the NDF or merely be something more along the lines of first among equals. For the oppositionists, the party was the NDF's "leading member organization". In a statement issued on April 24, 1993, the 20th anniversary of the founding of the NDF, the National Council elected at the 1990 congress attacked the Sison camp.

Instead of the principle of democratic pluralism, they proposed a return to a one-party dominated political and social order ...

¹⁵ See, for example, Kim Scipes, *KMU: Building Genuine Trade Unionism in the Philippines, 1980-1994*, Quezon City: New Day, 1996, p 190.

¹⁶ Anonymous, "Initial Comments on Armando Liwanag's Paper 'Our Stand on Modern Revisionism'", *Big Red Book*, no publication details, pp 187-188.

¹⁷ Joel Rocamora, *Breaking Through: The Struggle Within the Communist Party of the Philippines*, Manila: Anvil, 1994, pp 139-141.

Instead of a revolutionary federation within which the independence and initiative of member organizations have full play, they propose a return to a primitive conception of the NDF as a mere "front" of the CPP.

We acknowledge the valuable and leading role the CPP has played and continues to play in building the NDF. We think that its efforts to continuously earn and renew its leadership will not be helped by institutional and constitutional guarantees of its leading role as Stalinists have done in other countries.¹⁸

The Sison faction's response was summarised in a declaration of the party's Central Committee:

If the Party is only an ordinary member of a federation, there is no guarantee of proletarian class leadership over the bourgeoisie. The Party can be defeated by non-proletarian entities in voting within a federation ... It is sufficient for a united front to be a framework for consultation and consensus among allied forces. It is not a framework for voting. It is a weapon of the Party, not a formal arrangement that the Party and the working class places itself within, where it can be defeated in voting, its hands tied, its power diminished.¹⁹

For a good many years, as the party and the NPA grew and dissent was marginal, such an argument carried enormous sway within the ranks of the CPP. But by 1992, with the party clearly in disarray and the international situation turning sour, such points simply fuelled cynicism among a layer of members who increasingly saw defence of party hegemony as justification for a one-man style of inner-party leadership.

A common position was expressed by the Standing Group-Visayas Commission of the CPP, who wrote in November 1992 in a document entitled *Party Unity and Leadership Processes*:

We thought we are now past the stage wherein an individual – no matter how high his position in the Party may be – can easily monopolize the affairs of the Party ... But then, this malady ... is precisely what afflicts our Party today. And it is disheartening to

¹⁸ NDF, "NDF Anniversary Declaration: Uphold the Program, Constitution, and Structures of the 1990 Congress", issued by the National Council elected at the NDF Congress in July 1990, *Kasarinlan* 8, no. 4, 1993, pp 16-18.

¹⁹ "Desisyon ng Ika-10 Plenum ng Komite Sentral 1992 Hinggil sa Pagwawasto sa Konsepto ng NDF" (Decision of the 10th CC Plenum about the Rectification of the NDF Concept), pp 7-8, Rocamora, op cit, p 143, Rocamora's translation. This quote sums up how a Stalinist party can combine class collaboration and authoritarianism.

note that the person involved is Armando Liwanag, supposed to be the current Party chairman.²⁰

The document goes on to criticise the way in which *Reaffirm* was circulated and accepted with only "cosmetic" democratic procedures being used. It argues that *Reaffirm* accuses members of "grave crimes" without the opportunity of a hearing, and claims that possibly even the great majority of members reject the CC line. This criticism is in turn linked to the absence of the chairman. "But wonder of all wonders! The people's revolution is now being led though an electronic umbilical cord, by a chairman tucked away safe and in comfort, far in some distant land".²¹

A kinder, gentler Stalinism

IF THE opposition was unclear on exactly how far it wanted to revise or junk elements of the party's history and orthodoxy, its general mood crystallised in a widespread desire to reject Stalinism. The problem was that, as we saw in Chapter One, Stalinism was fuzzily defined. The most common understanding was a lack of democracy. Others bundled in centralised economic planning and the dictatorship of the proletariat.²² Accordingly, those who rallied around the 1990 NDF platform could see themselves as defending a radical socialist program that had broken with Stalinism.

What was missing was an appreciation of Stalinism as much more than the dictatorial style of a single historical figure, whether expressed within a party, or in a more general political or economic fashion. It also meant but a set of political positions including, crucially, "socialism in one country", class collaboration under the banner of the popular front, nationalism, and the stages theory of revolution. Again, as discussed in Chapter One, these ideas were introduced to the Philippine Communist movement from its birth as unquestioned orthodoxy.

The rupture in the PKP that saw the emergence of the CPP did not question this orthodoxy but consolidated it. Those breaking from the CPP in the 1990s saw themselves as breaking the

²⁰ Standing Group-Visayas Commission of the CPP, "Party Unity and Leadership Processes", *Big Red Book*, no publication details, p 41.

²¹ *Ibid*, p 42.

²² Sergio Tubongbanwa (pseudonym), "'Stalinist Distortions' and Their Implications for the Philippine Left", *Debate* 2, 1992, pp 23-41.

mould, but similarly carried with them into their new organisations and journals most of the core ideas in use for more than 60 years. This point will be drawn out below.

THE CRISIS OF GUERRILLAISM

A FURTHER element in explaining the crisis that gripped the CPP is a global enfeebling of the guerillaist project. For decades, the road to power in the Third World was paved with AK-47 assault rifles. Whether Mao Zedong's victory in China in 1949, Fidel Castro's overthrow of the Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista in 1959, the first pitched battle between Israel and Palestinian guerillas in 1968, or the National Liberation Front's victory over American imperialism in South Vietnam in 1973-1975, it was armed struggle that inspired millions in the underdeveloped world into action, and hundreds of thousands more in the industrialised nations into political solidarity.

The guerilla fighter was the symbol of the age. Inti Peredo, Che Guevara's successor as leader of the Bolivian guerilla movement, captured the mood with his battlecry:

We are convinced that the dream of Bolivar and Che ... will be attained through armed struggle, which is the only dignified, honest, glorious and irreversible method that will motivate the people. No other form of struggle is purer. Guerrilla warfare is the most effective and correct method of armed struggle ... Armed struggle will surge ahead vigorously until all of the people gain political awareness and rise up in arms against the common enemy, United States imperialism.²³

Today, the certainties are being undermined. Armed struggle has not disappeared, but the near-hegemonic conviction among radical nationalists that it represents the way forward is crumbling. From El Salvador to northern Ireland, the argument has been raised that a military victory by insurgent forces is no longer desirable, let alone possible. What is the general situation? Omar Tupaz offered the following summary in 1991:

Virtually all of the major national liberation movements have engaged in, or are seriously working towards, negotiations with their adversaries ...

²³ Inti Peredo, "We Will Return to the Mountains! Victory or Death!", *The New Revolutionaries: A Handbook of the International Radical Left*, Tariq Ali, ed., New York: William Morrow, 1969, p 105.

Among the liberation movements that have resorted to negotiations in the last few years aside from SWAPO [Namibia] are the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) of El Salvador, the Polisario of Saharawi, the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa ... the April 19 Movement (M-19) and Revolutionary Workers' Party (RWP) of Colombia, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG) of Guatemala and the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) of Kanaky (New Caledonia) ...

The trend towards negotiations is unmistakable; some international political analysts have even come to the conclusion that we are in an era of negotiation. From the '50s to the '70s, negotiations for the resolution of armed conflicts in the third world, particularly struggles for national liberation, were not too common. Now, it would seem that once an armed conflict has reached a certain level of intensity and protractedness, international and domestic forces are more likely to intervene and pressure the combatants to work out a negotiated political settlement to end the bloodshed.²⁴

Even if Tupaz is right in general, we have to sound a note of caution. Armed struggle is not about to vanish. From Kurdistan to Peru, men and women continue to take up arms against the state. Their efforts are not always without success – the perseverance of the Eritrean and Tigrayan guerillas played a considerable role in bringing down the hated Derg regime in Ethiopia in 1991. The East Timorese armed struggle provided some of the grit in Jakarta's shoe that led to the August 1999 referendum. Neither is it a case of simply extrapolating from defeats or setbacks, such as the marginalisation of the Tamil Tigers or the blockade that smothered the Bougainville Revolutionary Army. There have been defeats in past decades, too – in Malaysia and the Philippines after World War Two for example.

What makes the current period different is an emerging political trend that undermines not simply the practice of armed struggle but its theoretical legitimacy. The notion of negotiated settlement is increasingly being raised as an end in itself, with the armed struggle merely a method of achieving such a settlement.

Evidence for this position comes, for example, from Commandante Joaquin Villalobos, a member of the Revolutionary Army of the People (ERP) and a leader of the FMLN in El Salvador. In an

²⁴ Omar Tupaz, "Toward a Strategic View of Peace Negotiations", *Debate* pilot issue, 1991, pp 10-11. Tupaz's identity was noted in Chapter Six.

interview with the *New York Times*, he argued the way forward was not through armed struggle but through the FMLN's participation as an unarmed political group in a pluralist democracy.

He said that the military objectives of the FMLN had changed, its goal being no longer to impose a defeat or a reform on the Salvadoran army, but to seek on the contrary to obtain the permanent disarmament of the two parties, under the supervision of the United Nations.²⁵

In Guatemala, the M-19 movement made a peace deal with the regime and went on to participate in the electoral process. In El Salvador, the FMLN took a similar path. In South Africa, the ANC suspended the activities of its armed wing, Umkhonto weSizwe, as part of the process of entry into mainstream political life. Similarly, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) rejected "terrorist activity" to conclude the Oslo peace agreement and be granted limited autonomy over parts of the Occupied Territories. The Irish Republican Army has entered a ceasefire as a precursor to laying down its arms and participating in a purely "political" struggle.

The multiple examples offer substantial evidence for the contention of this thesis that guerillaism and electoralism are, potentially, interchangeable. If a brave minority is going to change the world on behalf of the masses, then it can become purely a tactical question whether this should be done with a gun or a parliamentary majority. What is significant is that either strategy marginalises the self-activity of the masses.²⁶

The trend, then, seems to confirm the trend that Tupaz outlines. This is not to say that armed struggle cannot take on a new lease of life in any of the countries mentioned above, nor that it cannot emerge in other places afresh, but that there is a gravitation towards negotiated settlements and the entry of former guerilla groups into the political mainstream.

Why is this the case? I will argue two prime factors have caught guerilla movements in a pincer. The first is the evaporation of practical and symbolic backing from the Stalinist bloc. According to secret documents revealed in 1992, the Soviet Union gave money to 109 organisations in more than 70 countries. While many of those organisations were non-violent, aid was channeled to armed groups like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.²⁷ The USSR's support of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in Vietnam was publicly acknowledged.

²⁵ *International Viewpoint* 206, May 13, 1991, p 17.

²⁶ For a discussion of this question, see Leon Trotsky, *Marxism and Terrorism*, New York: Pathfinder, 1997.

²⁷ *The Age* (Melbourne) May 27, 1992.

Yet little more than a decade after the NLF's victory, the Soviet Union under President Gorbachev indicated that its general strategy of support for guerilla groups fighting US allies was finished.

As part of the Reagan-Gorbachev summit in Iceland in 1986 it had been unofficially agreed that aid to Third World clients would be scaled down. The cessation of Russian and East German aid in everything from weapons to the printing of journals was a blow to the ANC [African National Congress] and a further pressure in the direction of a negotiated settlement. The 1988 New York agreement [which ended the war in Angola] ... also underlined the fact that Russia was no longer willing to support the ANC's armed struggle.²⁸

What was true for the ANC was true for other organisations conducting armed struggle, too. "The relations that we had with the Soviet Union have completely changed," Mario Lopez, a leading member of the FMLN, noted ruefully in 1991.²⁹ The winding down of the Cold War certainties was stripping guerilla organisations of potential allies. It was, of course, also stripping them of intellectual foundations.

The second factor is the extent to which the growth of the world economy has shut the door on the forms of national economic development which guerilla movements have generally espoused, especially in the 30 years following World War Two. This needs to be discussed in more depth.

The grasp of "globalisation"³⁰

WHAT UNITED virtually every post-colonial ruling class of the post-World War Two era, regardless of formal political colouration, was the desire to successfully transform its patch into an independent centre of capital accumulation. This imperative took on various forms and various names – from Peronism to African Socialism, to Arab Socialism or Ba'athism to the Burmese Road to Socialism even to President Marcos's New Society. But the hallmark of each was an attempt to build up an import-substitutionalist industrial base behind protectionist walls.

²⁸ John Rees, "The Socialist Revolution and the Democratic Revolution", *International Socialism* 83, 1999, p 59.

²⁹ "Behind the FMLN/Government Accords", *International Viewpoint* 218, December 9, 1991, p 26.

³⁰ The use of inverted commas is deliberate. The term globalisation has been imbued with many meanings, some fatalistic. I am using it here in the narrow sense of recognising the growth of the world market.

Those regimes that had emerged from a more runabustious struggle with the former colonial powers, like Nasser's Egypt or Nehru's India, were more likely to link the economic agenda to a political agenda of anti-imperialism or the creation of the likes of the Non Aligned Movement.

In many cases, the new ruling classes were drawn not from the ranks of the traditional rich, the merchant or capitalist classes which had been compromised by their cooperation with the former occupiers, but from among former students and middle-ranking officers, who felt acutely the national shame of underdevelopment and who were open to radical solutions. They had no compunction about wresting control of the state machine and using state ownership or at least state direction to channel and force-feed economic growth.

When these new young rulers looked around them for role models and allies, there were two choices. On the one hand was the United States, massively wealthy but whose anti-communism made it fiercely hostile to the nationalisation measures many of the new regimes were carrying through. On the other was the Soviet Union, once a backward, virtually Third World, country that had pulled itself up by its bootstraps.

State ownership and control had been central to the project, allowing the Soviet rulers to suppress the production of consumer goods and force a dizzy rate of accumulation of capital goods. The strength of this military-industrial complex had been triumphantly vindicated in the way that the USSR had emerged from World War Two stronger than ever and with a series of satellites in Eastern Europe.

For the new generation of Third World nationalists, the fact that this progress had come at the cost of complete suppression of democratic and national rights, the super-exploitation of both workers and peasants, and the eradication of the sexual and cultural progress unleashed by the October 1917 revolution was not of central importance. Nasser or Castro may have felt they best represented the national ideal, but they still came from a superior class and their political and ethical training led them to develop the economy over the heads of the masses rather than under the control of the masses.

From the late 1940s through to the early 1970s, there was therefore a common model of Third World development. It was statised, elitist, protectionist, concerned with the construction of a heavy industrial base (even if that was proving impossible), and was often prepared to call itself Marxist or Marxist-Leninist. Mao Zedong came to power already bearing the label, Fidel Castro appropriated it several years into power, and Gamel Abdel Nasser maintained a certain distance

from it, but within the constraints of the resources available to them they all set out along a similar state capitalist path.

The emergence of economic crisis in the 1970s precipitated a change in the terrain. Developing countries found their terms of trade deteriorating as raw material prices fell. A little later, as the 1980s opened, the pressure went from bad to worse as interest rates spiralled, leaving countries that had taken out cheap loans to fund development (and the personal consumption of the ruling class) paying extortionate interest rates. Increasingly, Third World ruling classes found that using the state to direct resources into heavy industry was draining their economies. It was becoming increasingly attractive to buy in technologies from the world market, or simply buy in goods that would be paid for by specialisation in niche export markets or by an expansion in the production of cash crops.

Although the Soviet Union had an incomparably stronger economy than those of many of its Third World acolytes, and although the pressure of the world market expressed itself primarily through the Cold War arms race rather than through trade and lending, these pressures were eventually to lead to *perestroika*, the collapse of the old state and its reorganisation on the basis of openness to the world economy. If changes in the global economy were strong enough to bring about the collapse of Stalinism, they were more than a match for the muscular Keynesian/import-substitutionalist model which shadowed Stalinism elsewhere.

With the benefit of hindsight, the pressures could be seen coming to bear by the end of the 1970s. Both Nicaragua and Rhodesia (soon to become independent Zimbabwe) should have been classic examples of Third World economic national development – following the path of neighbours Cuba or Tanzania. If Anastasio Somoza had been overthrown, and if the ZAPU guerillas had forced the resignation of the racist Ian Smith government, not in 1979 but a dozen years before, both countries would, more than likely, have followed the Third World “Marxist-Leninist” path. But neither did.

As Joel Rocamora writes:

At the level of conceptions of alternative societies, it is clear that Soviet-style, centrally planned economies is out. [sic] The Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, China and Vietnam have all abandoned this framework. The most recently victorious liberation movements, from Namibia, back in time to Zimbabwe, Angola and Mozambique, have never seriously tried to implement this model or just did not have the capacity to do so. The most

advanced liberation movements, among them the ANC in South Africa, the FDR-FMLN in El Salvador and the NDF in the Philippines have programmatically affirmed mixed economies.³¹

Right time, wrong place

THERE IS a third factor about guerillaism whose cause falls outside the conjuncture outlined above, but which nonetheless illustrates a weakness with the mode of struggle. The case for armed struggle is commonly put in terms of how repression rules out working-class resistance in the cities and in the workplaces. Yet in a number of cases, guerilla forces have found themselves unable to take full advantage as popular struggles have broken out that have toppled, or severely weakened, the central power. Two examples that stand out are those of the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the Palestinian intifada which began in late 1987.

In the case of Iran, Maryam Poya writes:

The guerrilla organisations' key weakness was that they ... saw the mass movement as "dormant and in a general state of inactivity" and saw themselves, by contrast, as "a vanguard that would revive the mass movement through struggle" ... Though both organisations regularly applauded each round of working-class resistance for its heroism ... [t]heir guerrilla strategy involved placing the whole emphasis on the heroic actions of a brave minority ... The tragedy of guerrilla politics in Iran is that the militants thereby cut themselves off from the day-to-day struggles.³²

³¹ Joel Rocamora, "Third World Revolutionary Projects and the End of the Cold War", *Debate* pilot issue, 1991, p 43. British academic Peter Binns coined the label "doubly deflected permanent revolution" to describe the trajectory taken by the Sandinistas and by Zimbabwean guerilla leader Robert Mugabe. Whereas Leon Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution explained how and why a minority working class in an underdeveloped country could lead the peasantry in an overthrow of capitalism, "deflected permanent revolution" was the attempt by British Marxist Tony Cliff to explain how middle-class elements could supplant the working class in the equation and turn anti-colonial movements in the direction of constructing undemocratic, bureaucratic state-capitalist regimes, as discussed above. Binns took the argument a stage further. Writing in 1984, he put forward the proposition to explain how the pressures of the world market meant that the guerilla leaders in Nicaragua and Zimbabwe had not turned to nationalisation and state ownership, but rather had embraced a mixed economy. In Nicaragua only the property of the Somoza family was confiscated. In Zimbabwe, Mugabe refused to expropriate the white farmers who held the overwhelming bulk of the best, export-oriented land. Peter Binns, "Revolution and State Capitalism in the Third World", *International Socialism* 25, 1984.

³² Maryam Poya, "Iran 1979: Long Live Revolution...Long Live Islam?", *Revolutionary Rehearsals*, Colin Barker, ed., London: Bookmarks, 1987, p 133.

CHAPTER EIGHT: INTO THE ABYSS

In late 1978, as demonstrations a million-strong took to the streets of the capital Tehran and strikes spread among oil workers, manufacturing workers and workers in virtually every other branch of industry, the guerillas found themselves essentially irrelevant. The Shah fled the country in January 1979. On May Day 1979, one and half million marched on the workers' demonstration; supporters of one of the guerilla groups mustered a few thousand on a separate rally. The fighters' heroism had not brought them political relevance.³³

In the case of Palestine, the PLO had been conducting armed struggle for more than two decades when one Israeli provocation too many brought tens of thousands of Arabs on to the streets of the Occupied Territories. It was the biggest threat to Israeli control over the territories since their seizure in 1967.

The scale of the movement was soon evident ... and soon spread [from Gaza] to the West Bank. By 21 December [1987] Palestinians in Israel had participated in a strike in support of the Occupied Territories; the whole Arab population living in Palestinian territory had been drawn into the movement ...

[T]he Uprising made no use of Palestinian guerrilla forces; its activists were unarmed youths. Despite Israel's determination to crush the movement with "force, power and blows" they continued the protests throughout 1988 with scarcely a pause.³⁴

The PLO, unlike the Iranian guerillas, was well placed to play a leading role in the struggle, with supporters and sympathisers throughout the Occupied Territories. But the politics of guerillaism meant that it saw the mass movement as a negotiating tool, rather than as a superior and more effective mode of struggle. The Palestinians made gains from the intifada, but on nothing like the scale that could have been achieved.³⁵

The parallels with the Philippines in 1986 are striking, with the EDSA experience combining elements of both the Iranian and Palestinian experiences. On the one hand, the CPP's main forces were outside Manila, where the mass movement was at its most powerful. On the other hand, the CPP's cadres in the metropolitan area had some influence, but did not have a clear political framework that could guide them in using it.

³³ Ibid, pp 139-141 and pp 151-152.

³⁴ Phil Marshall, *Intifada: Zionism, Imperialism and Palestinian Resistance*, London: Bookmarks, 1989, p 150.

³⁵ Ibid, pp 158-161.

Whither withering guerillaism?

AS THE long post-war boom ended in the 1970s, those who looked to a guerilla strategy were caught in a pincer. Economically their guerillaism had gone hand in hand with a degree of autarchy – absolute in Pol Pot's Kampuchea, relative in most other places – that was simply no longer supportable. Too many Third World basketcases littered the landscape. (Of course, opening to the world economy was to make things worse for the mass of the world's poor, but not only was that an unknown factor, but the failure of the previous model left regimes with little choice but to experiment.)

Previously, potential rulers could have looked at closing off their borders and conducting limited international trade with "fraternal" Russia or China. The goodwill or otherwise of the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank was not an important factor to be taken into account. But increasingly, new and potential governments had to consider the possibility that on coming to power that they would have to compromise with the world economy, as the Sandinistas and the freedom fighters in Zimbabwe had, in order to gain hard currency exports and access to lines of credit.

The other side of the pincer was, as mentioned above, the withdrawal of superpower support. In a dialectical twist of history, the failure of the Soviet Union was due to the same pressures of the global competition as those affecting the Sandinistas. But for most people, the collapse of "socialism" and the changes in the world economy were simply unfortunate coincidences.

The combination for guerillaists was more than unfortunate. They were simultaneously deprived of an economic model, a political legitimacy, and a potential ally. Hence the list of negotiations that Tupaz outline above, hence the peace deals in Israel/Palestine, El Salvador and northern Ireland.

The Philippine experience

THE PKP's guerilla years were not clouded by this conundrum. If the party had succeeded in seizing power in the 1950s, it undoubtedly would have followed the same general path as

communist parties elsewhere in Southeast Asia.³⁶ At its birth, the CPP was similarly untroubled by this future crisis of guerillaism: quite the contrary – in 1968 the hegemony of the guerilla road to national liberation and social transformation was probably more solid than at any time before or since. But as the party matured, it found the terrain changing under its feet.

First, as we have seen, both wings of the party began to court support from the Soviet Union in the hope that it might lead to military and other aid. For the Rejectionists in particular, heavy armaments were seen as crucial if the pace of military operations was to be stepped up. But the wooing came too late. By the time the CPP was prepared to propose, the Soviet Union was in terminal crisis.³⁷

Second, the potential for building a national economy largely divorced from the world market was becoming progressively more difficult. For the oppositionists, this added weight to their contention that what was desirable and necessary was a mixed economy, a view reflected in the 1990 NDF platform. This platform, in Rocamora's words: "Provides the best example of how far the NDF has moved away from a classical Marxist-Leninist framework. This old framework involved central planning with a minor role for private enterprise, and collectivization and mechanization of agriculture in order to accumulate the greatest possible surplus for the rapid development of basic industries."³⁸ The 1990 (oppositionist) platform, by contrast argued that:

The economy will be a mixed economy, consisting of private, cooperative and state sectors. The private sector will continue to play a significant role in the development of the economy even as the cooperative sector is expanded and the state assumes the leading role ...

Agricultural cooperation shall be vigorously promoted. The process of cooperativization and mechanization shall be accomplished in stages and in connection with the development of industry ...

³⁶ As argued in Chapter One, this armed struggle strategy was one that the PKP adopted only reluctantly. See William Pomeroy, "Negotiation as a Form of Struggle: The PKP experience", *Debate* 6, 1993, pp 61-76, for how the PKP twice ended armed confrontation with the state.

³⁷ Joel Rocamora, however, argues that changes in revolutionary thought and strategy in the Third World presaged, rather than reflected, changes in the Soviet bloc, "Third World Revolutionary Projects", *op cit*, p 41.

³⁸ Rocamora, *Breaking Through*, *op cit*, p 154.

The government shall guarantee the right to own the means of production and of consumption obtained through land reform, honest labor and entrepreneurship, skill, inventiveness and intellectual merit.³⁹

The orthodox can see, quite correctly, how the argument for economic (and political) pluralism legitimises and reinforces a move away from protracted people's war. If you are aiming to establish a pluralist state and economy with middle-class allies, why risk alienating them with a lengthy and violent revolutionary struggle?⁴⁰ The 1990 platform complements *all* the variations within the CPP opposition – the call for urban insurrection, or peace talks or parliamentary “struggle”.

For the orthodox, however, defending the old line of state-directed national economic development is not an easy alternative. Sison, challenged in 1993 on how the Philippine revolution would avoid the problems faced in Nicaragua or Zimbabwe, responded by saying that since prospects of a victorious Philippine revolution were in the distance, this was not a matter for concern: the world economy would no longer be dominated by monopoly capitalism by then.

If the Philippine revolution wins today, certainly there are big problems. But it's not going to win today, next month, next year or a few years from now. It's not going to win, it's just fine. The Philippine revolution in its protracted people's war will be able to wait out certain international, will be able to wait for certain international conditions. The advantages of the Philippine revolution could be derived from the worsening of the crisis of the world capitalist system on an unprecedented scale.⁴¹

Among the urban intelligentsia, in particular, such a line of argument was less and less convincing with every year. In the battle of ideas, the CPP leadership seemed simply to be ducking the argument coming from apologists for the dynamism of the world market. As Rocamora observed in 1994, Sison had yet to produce an alternative NDF program:

[H]e will still have to answer the question of what alternative society he is proposing to allies. If he is consistent, he then has to lay out a proposal for an alternative society which has collapsed in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and has been compromised

³⁹ Rocamora, *Breaking Through*, op cit, pp 154-158.

⁴⁰ Tubongbanwa op cit, pp 23-41.

⁴¹ Interview with author, Utrecht, July 8, 1993.

out of recognition in China and Vietnam. Outside the ranks of his followers, he is likely to have few takers.⁴²

Third, the party had to deal with the question of peace negotiations, given the legitimacy of the Aquino government. This raised the fundamental question: was the guerilla war one to be fought to military victory, as the orthodoxy insisted, or was it a device to gain a better, interim negotiated settlement?

As with so many other apparently clear-cut questions within the CPP, the lines of demarcation on this point were blurred. So Sison writes:

The struggle for a just peace entails as many specific forms of struggle as does the national democratic revolution. These include all legal and illegal forms of struggle. Among these forms of struggle is armed struggle, the principal question in any revolution. No social revolution is possible without the prior change of political power ...

The NDF can agree to a lasting truce but never to the liquidation of the NPA and the surrender of its arms. Any framework of peace negotiations which requires the surrender of NPA arms is totally unacceptable to the NDF.⁴³

This would seem to imply that negotiations should be no more than markers of the balance of armed power, subsidiary to winning a military victory as was the case for the National Liberation Front of Vietnam. Yet Dulce Obrero, a former member of the CPP's United Front Commission, wrote in an article apparently supportive of the Sison orthodoxy: "To call all of these efforts by the NDF [to get peace talks under way] a tactical ploy is not only to impugn the integrity of the NDF but also to undermine the process of negotiations itself."⁴⁴

The clearest call for a strategic approach to peace negotiations as a potential end in their own right, rather than as a tactical stepping stone on the way to military victory, comes from Omar Tupaz.

The victory of the national democratic revolution cannot be narrowly equated with victory through insurrectionary or military means. Decisive, if not total, victory for the

⁴² Rocamora, *Breaking Through*, op cit, p 153.

⁴³ Jose Maria Sison, *The People's Struggle for a Just Peace*, Utrecht: International Network for Philippine Studies, 1991, p 46 and p 62.

⁴⁴ Dulce Obrero (pseudonym), "Negotiations - Not a Tactical Ploy", *Debate* 1, 1991, p 84.

revolutionary forces could also be the outcome of a negotiated political settlement, as in Zimbabwe and Namibia.⁴⁵

Yet even Tupaz, either out of habit or fear of breaking too far, too fast, from the orthodoxy, preceded his remarks with these words:

The people's war currently being waged is a necessary and just war. The institutionalized violence of an oppressive and unjust social order cannot be dismantled without resorting to revolutionary violence ... People's war and negotiations are complementary, not contradictory.⁴⁶

Despite the disclaimer, the comrades who looked to the kind of arguments coming from Tupaz found that once the door to legality was open, it was only too tempting to go through. Sison, on the other hand, hardened his position as the factional situation in the CPP worsened.

dg/ Does the principle of protracted people's war mean that the final victory can only come through military means?

jms/ I think that the Filipino communists know their Marxist-Leninist theory of state and revolution. And they are privileged to be under such conditions that they can be guided by and realise the Marxist-Leninist theory of state and revolution ...

dg/ And therefore the armed struggle has to continue until victory?

jms/ I suppose so. That's the determination of the Communist Party of the Philippines, and all those involved in building already a people's government where it can be established ... The moment the revolutionary movement accepts at a beginning of a conference that the constitution of the reactionary government would be followed then that's already capitulation, surrender, pure and simple right from the start. And the revolutionary forces would not commit that mistake ...

dg/ What you're saying is, yes there can be a negotiated settlement, but only on the terms of the revolutionary movement.

⁴⁵ Tupaz, *op cit*, p 29.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p 28.

jms/ You know, you have answered your own question.

dg/ Good, tell me how I've answered my own question.

jms/ You have answered your own question, then it would have one side surrendering to the other side. But no side is willing to do that, so probably there would have to be a further change of the balance of forces, and change in the balance of forces would mean anywhere from stalemate to the total defeat of the other and the victory of one.⁴⁷

With its internal crisis, and the stabilisation of the Philippine state under President Fidel Ramos, the CPP has proven incapable of shifting that balance of forces. Peace talks dragged on desultorily throughout the 1990s to little end.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, large numbers of party members and supporters simply walked away from the armed struggle. For many, the Philippine political wheel had once again turned full circle: from guerillaism back to (muscular) reformism.

END OF THE LINE

THE DECLARATION of "autonomy" by the Manila-Rizal Regional Committee (MRRC) of the party quickly precipitated parallel declarations elsewhere in the CPP. Sison's "fax attacks" had "destroyed, perhaps forever, the glue of comradeship that bound the CPP together through more than two decades of struggle".⁴⁹ Within months, party sections covering about half the membership, and the majority of the worker and urban membership, had removed themselves from Sison's control.⁵⁰

The MRRC claimed a cadre membership of 5000⁵¹ and its departure could not help but be a severe blow to the CPP. It quickly formed a union political centre (BMP), a legal socialist propaganda organisation (Makabayan), youth groups and a new federation of mass organisations

⁴⁷ Interview, op cit.

⁴⁸ *The Age*, February 12, 2000, reported that talks were broken off in 1999 "after Manila ratified a Visiting Forces Agreement with the United States, allowing US forces to take part in military exercises in the Philippines".

⁴⁹ Manila-Rizal Regional Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines, "Declaration of Autonomy", *Kasarinlan* 9, no. 1, 1993, pp 114-122. Party Organizations in the Visayas, "Declaration of Autonomy", *ibid*, pp 123-133.

⁵⁰ Max Lane, "Communist Party of the Philippines: Background to the Split", *Links* 1, 1994, p 43. Kocamora, *Breaking Through*, op cit, p 132.

⁵¹ Lane, op cit, p 53.

(SANLAKAS).⁵² On Bonifacio Day, November 30, 1993, it claimed to mobilise 70,000 out of a crowd of 110,000 that marched in Metro Manila while the KMU was reported to have mobilised between 3000 and 5000. SANLAKAS leader Tony Cabardo said: "Everyone should see now what our capacities are. This is just the beginning."⁵³

In practice, once the process of splintering and regrouping was under way, it impacted deep into national democratic ranks. The bulk of KMU-affiliated unions walked out to form federations free of "outside political forces". Activists in NGOs and other human rights groups took a similar course. Former national democrats formed Sarilaya (kasarian-kalayaan, or gender liberation), a socialist feminist organisation, presumably a split from the national democratic Gabriela women's group. Others, including leading legal national democratic figures such as Lidy Nakpil-Alenjandro, Jimmy Tadeo and Etta Rosales, formed a broad political grouping called Siglaya (Isang siglo ng pakikibaka, bagong siglo ng paglaya, or A Century of Struggle, A New Century of Freedom).⁵⁴

Freed from the one factor that united them – party membership and discipline – activists began to spread in differing directions. Siglaya was clearly a sharp break to the right, embracing liberal democratic concepts of strengthening civil society. The organisation would "engage in ... mass struggles, electoral struggles, development work in the communities, work within the government, the military, the media, the Churches and other social institutions ..."⁵⁵ On the other hand, some party sections were attempting to balance a residual support for armed struggle (although most guerilla units had stayed with the Sison leadership) with legal, mass work. The CPP Visayas put it this way:

Should not these particularities [of Philippine society and its changes over 25 years] be a basis for giving emphasis to legal political struggle *vis-a-vis* guerrilla warfare and guerrilla base building? That in the conduct of revolutionary struggle, guerrilla warfare and legal political struggles should be part of the overall strategy, stressing one or the other at one time or another, depending on the prevalent political situation?⁵⁶

The reality was, once the fateful decision had been taken to step outside of the party structure, political confusion and competition exerted a gigantic centrifugal force on individuals and groupings that only months earlier had been part of an apparently solid, disciplined party. "One

⁵² Ibid, p 44.

⁵³ *Green Left Weekly*, December 8, 1993.

⁵⁴ For an overview of this process, see Rocamora, *Breaking Through*, op cit, pp 206-208.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p 208.

⁵⁶ "Declaration of Autonomy", op cit, p 130.

section of the opposition would recreate a CPP without Liwanag ... Others want to reexamine the assumptions underlying the Leninist conception of a vanguard party."⁵⁷ By late 1998, the Philippine Left, according to one summary, looked like this:

The largest communist formation, the former Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), has dispersed into several groupings, including:

1. those still under the CPP group of Jose Ma. Sison;
2. the MR group headed by Popoy Lagman;
3. the former breakaway from Lagman called the MR (Bloc);
4. the recently breakaway groups from the CPP in the Central Luzon, now forming into the Marxist-Leninist Party (MLP);
5. the groups based in the Visayas and Mindanao under the Revolutionary Workers Party (RPM); and
6. the Party of Proletarian Democracy (PPD); and various smaller groups mostly operating in Metro Manila (some with small pre-party formation, others in broad formation). A recent addition is the merged grouping of two socialist tendencies under the Sosyalistang Partido ng Paggawa (SPP) [of which more below].

... Attempts are under way to unify sections of the socialist forces. One major initiative is towards the formation of a socialist front. There is an ongoing "trilateral unity project" among the SPP, the MLP and the PPD ... The CPP and the Popoy group remain sectarian and reject any effort towards left unity.⁵⁸

While the CPP is not dead, it has suffered grievous blows. "Organizational inertia has enabled the Liwanag faction to retain the remaining Party units [as of 1994], but inertia is not a good antidote for cadre fatigue and disillusionment, and many Party members are just quietly leaving the Party."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Rocamora, *Breaking Through*, op cit, p 204.

⁵⁸ Joint Statement of the Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Proletaryo and the Liga Sosyalista, "Fusion Creates Philippines Socialist Party of Labour", *Links* 12, 1999, pp 43-44.

⁵⁹ Rocamora, *Breaking Through*, op cit, p 134.

CONCLUSION

THE FORMATION of the SPP (Socialist Party of Labour) is an interesting example of the cyclical tendencies within the Philippine Left. It was declared on Bonifacio Day, November 30, 1998, as a merger of the Liga Sosyalista (itself a split from the "autonomous" Metro Manila breakaway from the CPP) and the Rebolusyonaryong Partido ng Proletaryo (a split from the pro-Moscow PKP). Its founding statement, while silent on the vexed question of the Left and armed struggle, contains positive commitments to the leading role of the working class, the need to fight for workers' control of the factories, and the need for an open revolutionary socialist party "which directly intervenes in the political arena in order to arouse, mobilise and organise the masses in an uninterrupted struggle".⁶⁰

Compared to the hidebound Maoism of the CPP, this statement stands out with clarity. Yet it is likely that the Filipinos who founded the PKP would have found much of the language familiar. They, too, would have recognised the SPP's insistence that the workers' struggle was central, but that it had to take as its starting point the necessity of national democratic revolution as a prelude to the fight for socialism.⁶¹ In their day, that insistence was to open the door to cross-class alliances and a move sideways into (and out of) armed struggle.

Whether the SPP or other fragments of the Philippine Left repeat their history remains to be seen. The argument of this thesis is that relying on the political framework used by Philippine communists over 70 years makes repetition more likely.

⁶⁰ Joint statement, *op cit*, p 38.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p 38.

CONCLUSION: SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR

WHO KNOWS how many of the small group of young people who set up the CPP in 1968 really believed they could build the mass revolutionary movement of which they dreamed? Whatever their private reservations, the party's growth and the spread and success of its army was spectacular. Within 16 or 17 years, the party seemed to be within striking distance of power.

But the CPP's success was built on shaky foundations. Within a surprisingly short time, crisis burst into the public arena. The party split, its mass organisations divided, its influence fell sharply and cadres dropped out in droves. The global collapse of Stalinism could not be halted on the beaches of the South China Sea.

It is rapidly becoming the norm to centre any explanation of this turnaround on the CPP's decision to boycott the 1986 presidential election. The contributors in *The Revolution Falters*, Joel Rocamora in *Breaking Through* and Ben Reid in *Philippine Left*, to date the most substantial public attempts to explain the CPP's decline, all see the party's inflexibility in 1986 as the turning point.¹

This thesis has taken a different tack. The crux of my argument is that the CPP is heir to a Philippine Stalinist tradition that has seen swings between the two apparently counterposed political poles of urban, legal work on the one hand and rural, armed struggle on the other. The root cause of this vacillation has been the absence from Philippine communism of the concept of working-class self-emancipation.

Why though did the CPP come apart after 1986? Here the question of the party's orientation to the EDSA revolution does have importance – not because it was *the* mistake, but because it catalysed an underlying debate and brought the differences to the surface. Soon afterwards the

¹ Patricio N. Abinales, ed., *The Revolution Falters: The Left in Philippine Politics After 1986*, New York: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1996; Joel Rocamora, *Breaking Through: The Struggle Within the*

confusion was compounded by the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. The rural rank-and-file might shrug off overseas events, but the urban intelligentsia could not – and this, in the final analysis, is the class on which the CPP has been based.

So while the party had flaws, it took two external shocks to crack them open.

As the 1990s wore on, some critics of the CPP (particularly those associated with the party's former Manila-Rizal Regional Committee) began to comment on the way the party had downplayed working-class struggle. They took issue with Sison's semifeudalist analysis.² Welcome as this is, it is not enough.

What is still lacking is an explicit break with the concept of national democratic revolution, which implies class collaboration under a nationalist banner and the postponement of socialist revolution to a later stage. Such an orientation continues to leave workers as objects, not subjects, of history.

So long as Philippine communists regard themselves as national democrats first, the question of which form of struggle (urban/rural, legal/armed) to prioritise is a secondary one. So, for example:

- The defeated rump of the PKP could support "parliamentary struggle" while maintaining: "Our Party has always maintained that, in the Philippine context, armed struggle is an indispensable part of revolutionary strategy ..."³
- Sison's CPP has always put strategic emphasis on the armed struggle. Yet the CPP-led KMU union federation was one of the most productive examples of working-class organisation in the country's history.
- Filemon Lagman, leader of the Manila-Rizal party committee whose armed wing is the Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB), declared: "We're back to the classics – to Marx and Lenin – and to the proletariat."⁴ Yet ABB guerillas could see no contradiction in claiming responsibility for an armed attack in protest over oil price rises.⁵

Communist Party of the Philippines, Manila: Anvil, 1994; Ben Reid, *Philippine Left: Political Crisis and Social Change*, Manila: Journal of Contemporary Asia Publishers, 2000.

² Reid, *op cit*, pp 67-84.

³ William J. Pomeroy, *An American Made Tragedy: Neo-colonialism and Dictatorship in the Philippines*, New York: International Publishers, 1974, p 139.

⁴ *Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 16, 1996, p 21.

⁵ *The Australian*, March 3, 2000.

The evidence so far is that the Philippine far Left remains trapped in a circle. Where is the proletariat when a few brave individuals substitute their actions for those of the masses?

Is there an alternative strategy? I have highlighted times when working class struggle has pointed a different way forward. The problem has not been the absence of a working class (it does exist), or its relatively marginal size (it is a larger proportion of the population than in Russia in 1917), nor even its political level and success at organising (see the comments on the KMU above).

The central problem is that the national democratic orientation marginalises the workers' actions. Indeed, at key points the CPP consciously counterposed its strategy to working class mobilisation. In this sense, the failure around EDSA follows on from the CPP's squandering of the potential of the First Quarter Storm or of the working class mobilisations that began to crack open the Marcos regime from 1975 onwards.

I would like to finish by repeating a few words quoted in Chapter Four from the Makati shop worker, Loida Lentoco. She told the story of how she and co-workers went on strike in the face of martial law:

We went on strike even though they called it "illegal". We were intimidated and harassed by goons and the military but we managed to fight back. We never left the picketline and the women workers, especially the pregnant ones, were always on the front line. On November 19 our union president and secretary were captured and detained in Camp Crame ... But we stayed on the picket line, bravely shouting and singing our demands.

During the strike we learnt more about genuine trade unionism. We got support from different sectors, including students, hotel and factory workers and transport workers ... After 12 days of our strike, eating, marching and sleeping on the cold pavement outside the store, we finally won. The company, afraid of losing millions of pesos during peak season, granted all our demands.

Our strike was illegal but our solidarity, courage and determination helped us win. This was the first strike by female workers ever in the Makati area and the first to break the anti-strike and anti-picketing laws, which the Aquino regime has yet to repeal.⁶

⁶ Interview with author, Makati, January 1991.

CONCLUSION – SO NEAR AND YET SO FAR

Lentoco's experience made her an activist in the KMU, putting her under the sway of national democratic politics. I want to argue that it also showed that there was always a different road to revolution.

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January 16: Loretta Rosales, representing BAYAN.

January 16: Rolando C. Ilustre, representing Kaibigan.

January 17: Strikers at St Scholastica's College.

January 17: General Eduardo Ermita, Under-Secretary for Defense.

January 18: Gabriela activists.

January (date uncertain): Loida Lentoco, union activist.

February 4: Crispin Beltran, national chairman of the KMU union federation.

February 5: Written exchange with Satur C. Ocampo.

June 25: Filomeno S. Sta Ana, Freedom From Debt Coalition.

June 25: Renato Constantino junior.

June 25: Renato Constantino senior.

June 26: Solita "Winnie" Collas-Monsod, Secretary for Economic Planning until June 1989, later Professor at the UP School of Economics

June 27: Martha Daguno, organiser with Samakana (urban poor women).

June 28: Nancy Garcia, representing KMK (women workers).

Southern Tagalog, 1991

January 20: Aris Sarmiento, Solidarity for People's Power.

January 20: Rodolfo Erasga, head of fishermen's association, Calamba.

January 21: Teddy Belarmino, director of Workers' Education, Leadership and Development.

Samar, 1991

January 23: Roy Palomino, associate executive director of the Leyte Samar Rural Development Workers Association (LABRADOR), Tacloban.

January 25: Manseuito Aragenio, Florentino Dalmacion, Bienvenido Jayme, Leby Moreno, farmers in Sitio Gelalan-Agan, Barangay Somoge, near Catarman.

January 27: Ogie Acaba, League of Filipino Students.

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August 5: Romeo Tan, who joined the KM in 1969.

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October 17: Joel Rocamora, author.

October 17: Lidy Nacpil Alejandro, secretary-general of BAYAN.

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June 23: Joel Rocamora, academic.

June 24: CPP member, female (name withheld).

June 26: Manny Sarmiento, president of the Drug, Food and Allied Workers Federation, secretary for line industry organising, KMU.

June 27: CPP member, male (name withheld).

June 28: Satur Ocampo.

Utrecht, 1993

July 8: Jose Maria Sison, founder of the CPP.

Melbourne, 1997

November 16: Former CPP member, female (name withheld).

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