

Debates on the Philippine Left

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THIS ARTICLE IS an outsider's view on what is a very emotional (rightly, I believe) set of debates, which are of relevance not only for the Philippines but for the left in general. There are few genuinely objective views on such issues. My sympathies, and most of my friends, are with the dissident factions within the CPP, a fact that is reflected in this analysis. As such, this analysis must be considered only a partial take on the situation, not the whole picture.

THE ONLY MAJOR armed revolutionary movement remaining in Asia is the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its army, the New People's Army (NPA). Founded in 1968 and 1969 respectively, the CPP and NPA emerged during the height of the Cultural Revolution in China, a growing nationalist movement in the Philippines, the collapse of the Soviet-aligned Philippines Communist Party (PKP), and the U.S. retreat in Vietnam.

The major force in opposition to the Marcos dictatorship (1973–1986), the CPP/NPA was marginalized during the 1986 snap presidential elections and subsequent military-revolt-cum-popular-uprising known as the “EDSA Revolution,” which deposed Marcos and returned the Philippines to elite democratic rule under President Corazon Aquino.

Currently the CPP, NPA and its united front organization the National Democratic Front (NDF) are embroiled in a debate that has split the party, as well as divided activists in legal organizations. The issues in the debate: what does socialism mean after 1989; the relationship between mass movements and left parties; internal party democracy, and the relative role armed struggle should play in the contemporary revolutionary process in the Philippines — reflecting issues which other left movements have been, or are, debating throughout the world.

In the Philippines, this debate has become intensely personal and reflects the challenge of left renewal in the current world (dis)order.

Background

The CPP and the NPA grew slowly during the early 1970s, but began a rapid expansion after Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law in 1973, when many student, labor, and peasant organizers were forced to go underground. The only organization with an underground network, coherent ideology, and base of peasant support was the CPP/NPA.

The NPA and CPP suffered some major military defeats in the mid-late 1970s, as they struggled to develop a practice of armed struggle in the countryside in an archipelago with poor communications infrastructure, and in the absence of a Yanan-style base area, a la Mao. By the early 1980s, with repression and human rights violations increasing, increasing problems with the economy, and the failure of elite-led attempts to broaden political space, the CPP/NPA and NDF seemed to be the only viable alternative political center to the dictatorship.

NPA forces grew to roughly 25,000 by 1985, and forces close to the party were able to mobilize several *welgang bayans* (people's strikes) throughout the second-largest island of Mindanao.

During the CPP/NPA and the NDF's expansion in rural areas, they had also gained more adherents among students, professionals and the urban middle classes, but problems with coalition-building and sectarianism prevented them from maximizing the upsurge in urban protests which broke out after the assassination of opposition politician Benigno Aquino on August 21, 1983.

The 1986 presidential election between Marcos and Aquino's widow, Corazon Aquino, found the CPP and its allies on the sidelines (officially, although many participated as individuals), since the party took a boycott position while the base mobilized to demonstrate opposition to Marcos at the ballot box.

The ascension of Corazon Aquino to the presidency brought some initial hope that, despite its heterogenous composition (human rights activists, military officers from the Marcos regime, and traditional politicians) there would be an opportunity to move beyond a mere restoration of elite politics as usual. Ceasefire negotiations between the NDF and the Aquino government broke down in early 1987 after a massacre of peasant activists at the gates of the presidential palace.

Under pressure from the United States and right-wing elements in the Aquino coalition, the government expanded the war in the countryside, reinforced by troops formerly used to protect Marcos, and with a more sophisticated counterinsurgency strategy. While human rights violations in some categories did decline, in others they increased, especially the numbers of “salvaging” (extrajudicial execution) and internal refugees displaced by military operations.

But — and this is one of the key elements in the debate — the CPP and NPA were never able to shift gears quickly enough to deal with the new political terrain. The political line that the “U.S.-Aquino regime” was just like the “U.S.-Marcos regime” did not sway masses of people, although it did correspond to the realities of the CPP’s mass base in some rural areas.

Combined with battle fatigue among the NPA’s mass base, greater political space in the urban areas, the arrests of top CPP and NPA leaders, human rights violations within the CPP/NPA itself, and the Aquino government’s promise (if not reality) of reforms, the CPP/NPA lost the national initiative over the 1987–1992 period, although it did regain it at some regional and local levels.

From Aquino to Ramos

The election of Fidel Ramos to the presidency in May, 1992 seemed to foreshadow even greater militarization of Philippine politics. Ramos had served as the head of the Philippine constabulary under the Marcos dictatorship, and then as chief-of-staff of the armed forces and Minister of Defense under the Aquino regime.

Under Marcos, the constabulary headed by Ramos was notorious as the most corrupt of the military services, and the one responsible for many of the human rights violations. Under Aquino he had presided over the implementation of her “total war at the grassroots.” That Ramos was elected with only 23% of the vote in a seven-candidate field, and lacking a parliamentary majority, suggested that he would be unable to govern.

But Ramos has been successful against all expectations. He forged a legislative coalition, and has been successful at passing laws on economic privatization and trade liberalization. The economy has been able to grow at 1.7% last year, a paltry amount in comparison to its Asian neighbors, yet better than the last few years of negative or zero growth.

Ramos also has a vaguely-defined economic project known as “Philippines 2000.” While short of an organized social base, let alone a coherent economic package, it has caught the imagination of a significant component of the elite and the middle classes, not least because of its emphasis on economic growth. When Ramos then asked the Congress to repeal the law which made membership in the Communist Party illegal (which the Congress did), and released members of both the CPP leadership and former military coup plotters in an amnesty, it was difficult to paint the regime as a just another in a line of U.S. puppets.

This context of a stabilized (if not hegemonic) system of “low-intensity democracy,” to use Philippine analyst Joel Rocamora’s phrase, with a modicum of economic growth, provided the Philippines left with a major opportunity to reinsert itself at the center of the political scene. Instead, in the last few years the CPP/NPA and the NDF have been engulfed in a tense debate, which has split the party and found the left without a organized response to the Ramos government, less than a decade after it seemed poised to make a play for state power. It is to that story that I now turn.

The Split

Christmas has not been a good time for dissident members of the CPP. On December 10, 1992 Jose Maria Sison, the founder of the CPP now living in exile in the Netherlands, faxed letters to Philippine newspapers denouncing four prominent members opposed to a party rectification campaign which had begun in mid-1992.

This unprecedented declaration included unsubstantiated allegations that some of the four were military agents. A year later, at a press conference held on December 14, 1993, Gregorio Rosal (also known as Ka Roger, a commander of the New Peoples Army in the Philippines) declared that the four were to be tried in absentia on charges of gangsterism, corruption, and sabotage of the CPP/NPA.

This moment marked the irreversible split in the party, and brought the latest phase of what was referred to as “the debate” to a more frightening level of tension. The implications for the broader left in the Philippines as well as elsewhere are important, sixty years after show trials and purges in the former Soviet Union.

The split grew from a series of debates, the most recent and serious one over strategy and tactics, and their relationship to the party's decline in the late 1980s and early 1990s. But the split is also due to an attempt by one faction of the party leadership, led by Armando Liwanag, to assert their ideological and organizational control over the party and the National Democratic Front (founded by the CPP in 1973). The split reflects ultimately the ossification of a party leadership and organizational structure which made it impossible to process new ideas in a way that drew on the experiences of organizing in struggle over the last twenty-five years.

The current leadership of the CPP were unwilling to sponsor a broad-based rank-and-file discussion of the theoretical, programmatic, strategic and tactical issues at stake. That leadership also forced the issues literally onto the front pages of newspapers in Manila, and poisoned the debate with unsubstantiated allegations of opposition leaders as military agents and traitors.

The current split is the final moment in a longer process of internal debate and discussion, which had its roots in debates over strategy and tactics beginning in the late 1970s/early 1980s, and accelerated in the 1983–1985 period following the assassination of Benigno Aquino. Continuing through the blossoming of the anti-dictatorship movement and then the period of CPP/NPA stagnation and decline, in the post-1989 period these debates about strategy and tactics also became linked to debates around the political and economic visions of socialist alternatives, and the question of internal party democracy and the autonomy of mass organizations.

The Issues

The debates that emerged in the 1983–1986 period included questions over coalition work, the decision to boycott Marcos' snap election held in February 1986, and the analysis of the nature of the ensuing Aquino regime.¹ These issues involved how to relate to the urban middle classes (or "middle forces") who had played a key role in the anti-Marcos movement, approaches to electoral and other legal struggles in a new political context, and the role of armed struggle with an elected civilian regime.

The party's post-election self-criticism of its boycott position (which had been taken against the views of many lower-level party units), and its declaration to create spaces for debates on these issues, seemed to suggest that the party was reinventing itself for the post-Marcos era.

After the failure of negotiations between the NDF and the Aquino government, and the clear shift within the Aquino government to the right, the party leadership charted a path for heightening the armed struggle, through the "regularization" of NPA units and increased offensives. While doubts crept in over the next few years, the party anniversary statement of 1990, "Lead the Masses, Launch the Offensives," claimed that the Philippines was in a revolutionary flow, a view which was criticized by many party leaders who are now in the opposition.

By 1990, however, the CPP and NPA were in a clear crisis: "From 1987–1990, party membership decreased by 15%, the total number of barrios under its coverage by 16%, the total numbers of the people's army by 28%, and the total membership in the rural mass organizations by 60%. A big number of cadres at the provincial, front, and district level were lost due to arrest, death, or demoralization."²

The debate over the explanation of this decline is the crux of the dispute which led to the split in 1993. There are no serious disagreements that the party and the broader national democratic movement is in crisis; the disputes arise over the explanations for that crisis, and the respective solutions.

¹ This is not the place for a discussion of these issues, but good starting points include Joel Rocamora's forthcoming book on the CPP/NDF, as well as articles in the magazine *Debate: Philippine Left Review* (available for \$24 annual subscription. Send checks made out to *Debate* to John Gershman, 2331 Russell Street, Berkeley, CA 94705).

² "General Review of Significant Events and Decisions, 1980–1991," *Debate* No. 7 (August 1993). This is an English translation of "Pangkalahatang Pagbabalik-Aral sa mga Mahahalagang Pangyayari at Pasya (1980 Hanggang 1991)," published in the January 1993 Special issue of *Rebolusyon*, which appeared under the name of the Central Committee, July 1992, finalized by the Executive Committee, November 1992.

To Reaffirm or Not to Reaffirm

The most recent round of debate on the crisis was launched in January 1992, when Armando Liwanag's "Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors" was released. Presented as a summation and assessment of the party's struggles from 1977–1990, the document (known in shorthand as "Reaffirm," and its supporters as Reaffirmists) identifies the causes of that crisis and a proposed solution.

The causes of the crisis, according to Reaffirm, are deviations from the basic principles of the party in ideological, political and rganizational terms. In summary, these are —

- *Ideologically*: the movement away from the texts of Mao and towards those of the Soviet Union, Vietnam, and Nicaragua as examples of insurrectionary seizures of state power and a strategy of "quick military victory."
- *Politically*: abandonment of the analysis of the Philippines as semi-feudal and semi-colonial; misunderstandings of the "protracted people's war" strategy of "encircling the cities from the countryside;" and the dilution of the party's role within the NDF as well as "dilution" of the NDF program.
- *Organizationally*: over-centralization and bureaucratization of the party staff, with fewer cadre going to rural areas.

The core solution to the party's myriad problems is the "reaffirmation" of the party's founding principles, which include:

- adherence to the theory of Marxist-Leninism
- repudiation of modern revisionism
- analysis of Philippine society as semi-colonial, semi-feudal
- general line of the national democratic revolution
- leading role of the working class through the party
- theory of people's war and the strategic line of encircling the cities from the countryside
- united front along the revolutionary class line
- democratic centralism
- socialist perspective
- proletarian internationalism

The organizational method to accomplish this reaffirmation was a rectification campaign, and those who opposed it should be disciplined, up to and including expulsion from the party.

By mid-1992, Liwanag and his allies in the leadership were ready to pursue the rectification campaign. They convened the now-controversial 10th Plenum of the Central Committee, which is claimed to have approved Reaffirm, the framework for proceeding with the rectification movement/purge, and a number of reforms of the CPP constitution which concentrated power away from the Central Committee and towards the Politburo, the Executive Committee and Chair of the CPP.

A major change was the expansion of the power of the Executive Committee to "make decisions and issue statements on major new initiatives and on questions of policy that are national and international in character," a power previously held only by the Politburo.

It is important to note that the Executive Committee is composed of three people: Armando Liwanag (based abroad) and a husband-and-wife team based in the Philippines, who are seen as staunch Liwanag allies. The 10th Plenum has been criticized even by some who attended as procedurally problematic. The party leadership elevated a number of people to the Central Committee in order to create a quorum, and there was a lack of broad-based representation.

Modern Revisionism

While Reaffirm itself concentrates on issues of strategy and tactics — the area of greatest debate within the party — it is connected to a broader set of debates about the alternative visions of society, politics and economy for which the party stands, and the nature of the current international situation. These issues became particularly relevant after 1989.

The Reaffirm position is connected to these broader issues in Armando Liwanag's paper "Stand for Socialism Against Modern Revisionism,"³ which blames "modern revisionism" as the source of socialism's collapse in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and is a staunch defense of Stalin. For example:

Stalin's merits within his own period of leadership are principal and his demerits are secondary. He stood on the correct side and won all the great struggles to defend socialism, such as those against the Left opposition headed by Trotsky; the Right opposition headed by Bukharin, the rebellious rich peasants, the bourgeois nationalists, and the forces of fascism headed by Hitler.⁴

While the debate had been conducted semi-clandestinely by party members,⁵ it burst into the public with Sison's now-infamous "fax attack" in December, 1992, which blew the debate literally onto the front pages of the Manila papers, and any pretense that there was an internal debate flew out the window.

The Opposition

From Reaffirm's initial release in January 1992, party members both inside the Philippines, as well as in Europe and the United States started circulating papers, polemics and letters of concern relating to both the substantive issues addressed in Reaffirm, as well as with the process by which the approval of the documents and the "rectification Process" (or purge) was being conducted.

The opposition, also known as "rejectionists," which emerged in response to the Reaffirm and Stand Against Modern Revisionism documents as well as to the initiation of purges, brought together a rather disparate group of party members who were united solely on the issue of opposition to the arguments contained in Reaffirm and to the authoritarian practices of Armando Liwanag and his allies in the current CPP leadership.

In some areas all sides agree, for example, that the reorganization of the military which placed more units in the field, and its shift in tactics led to increased success in the field against the NPA. Improvements in the Armed Forces of the Philippines' intelligence operations contributed probably the most problems for the NPA and the CPP. These were particularly critical, not only because of the capture of a number of high-ranking CPP leaders in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but because of the military's effectiveness at placing agents within the movement itself (known as deep penetration agents or DPAs).

The party's discovery of these agents led to a number of serious anti-DPA campaigns beginning in the early 1980s, most dramatically in Mindanao in 1985–86, and in the Southern Tagalog region in 1987. A number of arrests and failed NPA operations led to suspicions that the military had placed agents within the party structure. A number of party members were interrogated by torture to discover the identities of the agents — a process which led not to discovering them, but to generating panic and hysteria in the party and among its allies.

At least several hundred people were tortured and/or executed by their own comrades, and the morale and cohesion of the movement in Mindanao was nearly destroyed. Membership in the party fell from nine to three thousand; NPA forces fell from fifteen companies and thirty platoons to two companies and seven platoons; and the mass base was cut in half on Mindanao.

While opposition figures agree that the anti-DPA campaigns hurt the Party, they place less emphasis on the shift of strategy to "insurrection" (as alleged by Reaffirm) as the cause. This was because these campaigns happened

³ "Stand for Socialism Against Modern Revisionism," Rebolusyon, No.2, Series 1992, April-June.

⁴ Ibid, 2.

⁵ Semi-clandestinely because party members on all sides were speaking about it with people during my visit there in March-July, 1992.

in areas where insurrection (Mindanao) and protracted people's war (Southern tagalog) strategies were ostensibly pursued. Opposition leaders point instead to inadequate provisions for due process, a view of justice constrained by Marxist-Leninist ideas of "class justice" and failures of leadership by high-level party organs, among others.⁶

The early stage of the debate lasted from roughly mid-1992 through mid-1993. Opposition figures focused primarily on writing critical responses to specific points raised in "Reaffirm," rather than an alternative summation. This was due in part to the commitment by party members to resolve the debate within official party channels, and a reluctance to appear as if they were creating a faction — and was also because some opposition party leaders had not addressed (at that time) some of the concerns mentioned in Reaffirm, including the anti-DPA campaigns and the militarization of the CPP/NPA's strategy in the late 1980s.

The welter of responses to Reaffirm, however, do discuss specific points raised by the document, and generally fall within into two main camps, one focusing on elements external to the party and others on internal questions of party strategy, tactics and organization. The former include the political shift from the Marcos dictatorship to the Aquino regime, and the success of the Aquino regime's total war strategy.

Internal factors include the anti-DPA campaigns, the boycott position in the 1986 election, excessive centralization of leadership with the three-person Executive Committee of the Central Committee. The Manila-Rizal Committee points out that the legitimacy and authority of party organs is reduced because there has not been a party congress since the party's founding.⁷

Even as late as April, 1993, some party members believed that there was the potential of keeping the debate within party boundaries and mediating between the groups within party structures. By June, that position was no longer tenable. Even some who recognized that fact, however, refused to leave, challenging the party to purge them. As one member of the National United Front Commission (NUFC) said to me, "I won't make their job easy. They'll have to reorganize me out of the party. I have fought too long to surrender the party to them."⁸

But the CPP leadership effectively formalized the split in May, 1993, when it characterized the internal party struggle as one between "revolutionaries" and "counter-revolutionaries." The "rejectionists" were confronted with the challenge of how to respond. There was no space left in the party for opponents of "Reaffirm."

Autonomy Declarations & Democratic Bloc

In July, 1993, the Manila-Rizal Regional Committee (MRRC) moved first by declaring autonomy from the central party leadership. It did not declare itself a split, but claimed that it no longer recognized the leadership of Armando Liwanag and the Central and Executive Committees elected at the 10th plenum.

Manila-Rizal represents the largest single bloc of activists to declare autonomy from the party leadership, with an estimated 5,000 members. In their declaration they claim that 295 out of 300 party branches voted for autonomy. Manila-Rizal was followed by the Visayas Commission and the National Peasant Secretariat in the fall of 1993.

In mid-October, 1993, the National United Front Commission of the CPP called for a unity congress and rejected the "revolutionary-counterrevolutionary" formulation. On December 22, a group of party units and members including the Visayas Commission, Mindanao party organization (Democratic Bloc), National Peasant Secretariat, National United Front Commission, International Department (Democratic Bloc) and Members of the Central Committee (Democratic Bloc) declared their intention to work together as a Democratic Bloc within the CPP.⁹

⁶ For a thorough discussion of this period in the CPP/NPA history, see the excellent article by Walden Bello, "The Philippine Progressive Movement Today," *Philippine Alternatives* 1:2 (September 1992).

⁷ Manila-Rizal Regional Committee, "Absolutismo Ng Isang Sirkulo, Laban sa Demokratikong Sentralismo ng Isang Leninistang Partido" ("Absolutism by One Circle Against Democratic Centralism in a Leninist Party), document.

⁸ Interview with NUFC member, June 17, 1993.

⁹ "Out of Crisis, Renewal: A Statement of the Democratic Bloc within the CPP," *Debate*, No.9, March 1994.

The State of the Opposition

Immediately after the declarations of autonomy and through the formation of the “Democratic Bloc,” the opposition has continued the long, tortuous process of trying to decide the next steps. Two rough groupings have emerged: the Leninist Opposition and the Third Force.

The Leninist Opposition is represented most consistently by the critiques of party members affiliated with, or sympathetic to, the Manila-Rizal Regional Committee (MRRC), which frames the debate as one between Leninist and Stalinist conceptions of the party.¹⁰ As such they locate themselves as the true Leninists, fighting against Stalinism as represented by Armando Liwanag and his allies in the CPP leadership.

The Third Force includes many people from the United Front Commission, the National Peasant Secretariat, and the International Department. Extremely heterogenous, this part of the opposition is more willing to question Leninist organizational principles as a whole, including democratic centralism, the vanguard party, the vision of socialism. One group, the Suriang Sosyalista, formed in May 1993 in an attempt to develop an alternative summation process, based on moving beyond Marxism-Leninism to incorporate insights developed in various critiques of Stalinism, the theory and practice of social movements, and other traditions.¹¹

Some members of the Third Force were unwilling to countenance a de facto alliance with the MRRC early on, because of significant historical disagreements with the MRRC. One had to do with MRRC’s militarism, relating in particular to a wave of assassinations of police in the late 1980s, as well as bus burnings conducted by the armed units under the control of the MRRC during the *welgang bayan* in 1990, with disastrous results for that struggle.¹²

As of early 1994, the Liwanag faction retained the allegiance of a majority of the territorial units and most of the guerrilla forces. But the MRRC, and the leading party committees of Negros, Central Mindanao, most of Panay and Bohol, and some urban party committees in several regions, have all declared autonomy. And the CPP national staff is weakened by the loss of almost all cadres involved in united front, peasant, and international work.

The National Democratic Front

A key arena of struggle at present is over the future of the NDF. The NDF is composed of the CPP, the NPA, and fourteen mass organizations of students, workers, peasants, etc.¹³ It also includes territorial formations that serve as shadow governments. The NDF is allegedly an independent force from the party, with the CPP as one member among many; but in many ways the NDF has been “an alliance of the party with itself,” in the words of one party member. The debate has sparked a struggle that tests the degree of genuine autonomy of the NDF mass organizations.

The struggle over the NDF reached its height on April 24, 1993, the twentieth anniversary of its founding. Eighteen members of the NDF National Council released a statement to the press that exposed the struggle over the soul and direction of the NDF. The group, known as the “verdaderos” (truth-bearers), noted:

“There is a need to reaffirm the validity and integrity of the 1990 NDF Congress and its decisions, because the internal conflict in its leading member organization, the Communist Party of the Philippines,

¹⁰ See, for example, the Manila-Rizal Regional Committee’s Declaration of Autonomy and the discussion by Sonny Melencio, “Leninism vs. Stalinism: Current debate in the Communist Party in the Philippines,” in *Links* 1 (April-June 1994), 29–56.

¹¹ See Suriang Sosyalista, “Declaration of Principles,” May 15, 1993.

¹² The Peoples Caucus, an ND initiative, had forged a broad united front on the issue of an oil price hike led by legal organizations. The Manila party leadership, instead of following the momentum of the strike, turned to military means (burning buses) which effectively ended the momentum of the strike, and destroyed the painstakingly constructed credibility of legal ND forces built up in coalition work.

¹³ Christians for National Liberation (CNL), Kabattaang Makabayan (KM, Patriotic Youth), Katipunan ng mga Gurong Makabayan (KGM, Association of Patriotic Teachers), Katipunan ng mga Samahang Manggawa (KASAMA, Federation of Labor organizations), Pambansanang Katipunan ng Mga Magbubukid (PKM, National Association of Peasants), Rebolusyonaryong Kongreso ng Kilusang Unyon (RKKL, Revolutionary Congress of Trade Unions), Artista at Manunulat ng Sambayanan (ARMAS, Artists and Writers for the People), Makabatang Samhang Pangkalusugan (MSP, Patriotic Health Association), Cordillera Peoples Democratic Front (CPDF), Makabayang Kilusang ng Bagong Kababaihan (MAKIBAKA, Patriotic Movement of New Women), Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), New Peoples Army (NPA), Lupon ng Mga Manananggol Para sa Bayan (LUMBABA, Council Council of Lawyers for the Country), Liga ng Agham Para sa Bayan (LAB, League of Science for the People).

is being used by some to undermine the NDF. In the service of their inter-party struggle, a powerful faction of the CPP is waging a campaign against the NDF program, constitution, and organizational structure. They have illegitimately suspended the operations of the full NDF National Council and the full National Executive Committee, and have arrogated the powers of the NDF leadership to a small group that is not accountable to these leadership bodies, much less to all NDF member organizations and units.”¹⁴

The response of the Reaffirmists in the CPP leadership was to attack the “verdaderos” as “counter-revolutionaries” and “psywar assets of the U.S.-Ramos regime” out to destroy the NDF.¹⁵ The Liwanag faction has tried to re-establish party hegemony and control over the NDF by creating a three-person National Executive Council, including Liwanag. This “NEC” abolished NDF organizations abroad and disenfranchised NDF representatives, moves opposed by NDF organizations in Europe and the United States.

This split mirrors a long process of debate over the NDF program.¹⁶ The main distinctions in these debates revolve around the question of the economy and the political system (mixed economy vs. state-socialist central planning, and democracy vs. one party state), as well as over the inclusion of other issues raised by social movements over the past twenty-five years, including feminism, environment and rights of national minorities.

These are part and parcel of the debates over the alternative vision which the revolutionary movement offers to the Philippines, debates addressed by the “Stand Against Modern Revisionism,” as well as the implications of changes in Philippine society and the world in the last twenty-five years for revolutionary principles, visions and practice. “Reaffirm” offers a call to return to the principles of a generation ago, while the Opposition tries to develop a process for addressing the significant changes confronting the revolutionary movement since the CPP’s founding.

The Legal ND Movement

Legal organizations and movements that are part of the National Democratic Movement have also been affected by the split in the CPP. The debate within the CPP has served in a sense as a de facto test of the degree to which mass organizations, which emerged during and after the Marcos dictatorship, have autonomy from intraparty dynamics.

Some groups have become virtually paralyzed. Other groups, however, have been able to assert their autonomy and carry on with their work, despite party debates. As might be expected, the most severe splits have occurred in the peasant (Movement of Philippine Peasants, KMP) and labor movement (May First Movement, KMU). The split in the KMP led to the formation in November 1993 of the Demokratikong-Kilusang ng Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (Democratic Movement of Philippine Peasants — DKMP), which is headed by Jaime Tadeo.

Labor federations which belonged to the KMU now belong to one of two federations. One group still remains with the KMU center. Two of the three largest former KMU-federations joined with six other federations to found a new labor center, the National Confederation of Labor (NCL), which had its founding congress in April, 1994.

The Buklurang Manggawang Pilipino (BMP, Association of Filipino Workers) was formed by activists from the former Manila-Rizal regional chapter of the KMU as an openly socialist political center for trade unions in Metro Manila.

Other individuals active in broad work in the ND formation BAYAN have coalesced around a political formation known as Siglaya (Siglo ng Pakibaka, Bagong Siglo ng Paglayaor — Century of Struggle, New Century of Freedom). Siglaya reflects a movement that draws on the national democratic tradition, but places the autonomy of mass organizations and democracy at the center of its program, which includes among other concerns women’s rights, the environment, and a mixed economy.

¹⁴ “NDF Anniversary Declaration: Uphold the Program, Constitution, and Structures of the 1990 Congress,” printed in KASARINLAN 8:4 (Second Quarter 1993), 16–18.

¹⁵ Executive Committee, Central Committee, CPP, “Clarifications on the Party’s Stand on the Peace Talks, NDF, and the so-called Verdaderos,” KASARINLAN, 8:4 (Second Quarter 1993), 24–25.

¹⁶ This debate is discussed at length by Joel Rocamora, “The NDF program and the CPP Program For a Peoples Democratic Revolution: Umbilical Cord or Lifeline,” Debate No.5 (December 1992), 3–38.

The attempt by some oppositionists to no longer refer to themselves as the “Reject” camp but as the “Rejoice” bloc, reflects an incipient attempt to move the points of reference in the process of left renewal away from the terrain defined by Armando Liwanag and “Reaffirm.” This is an attempt to construct an independent path toward a new vision, strategy, and practice for the left, building on the traditions of the CPP and the national democratic movement, but not constrained by them.

Weakening Or Alliance Building?

Given the weight of the party-led national democratic forces, the party debate has weakened, in the short-term, the Philippine left as a whole. In the medium-term, however, this crisis could be an opportunity for exciting new innovations in alliance-building and popular organizing, as groups move away from sterile rhetoric and paralyzing dogmatic debates.

This is clearly the challenge facing the left. While the debate continues, a fitful process of regroupment is also occurring among certain sectors of the opposition, often in concert with other left forces, which include BISIG, Popular Democrats and Pandayan (left-wing social democrats).

This process will be much longer and more tense than the process of declaring autonomy, as the basis of unity — opposition to Reaffirm — does not necessarily translate directly into a platform for unifying a disparate left. This process will clearly involve long, torturous debates over principles and values, programmatic visions as well as strategy and tactics.

One challenge for the opposition is to draft a version of its history in a democratic fashion, and confront head-on the uncomfortable parts of its own history, such as the anti-DPA campaigns. This will be by necessity a long and difficult process, and it will involve significant emotional as well as political costs.

Whatever the ultimate benefits in terms of new political formations and initiatives, the human costs of the debate, split, and renewal of the movement will have the longest-lasting repercussions. Cadres and organizers who gave their lives for a movement have had that movement reject their concerns out of hand, and the whole process has split asunder personal friendships and comradeship. The challenge of renewal of the left, in organizational terms, may prove ultimately to be a far easier task than the renewal of left activists.

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John Gershman
Debates on the Philippine Left
1994

ATC 53, November-December 1994. solidarity-us.org/atc/53/p2963

An article on the contemporary history of the Philippine communist left dominated by the Marxist-Leninist-Maoist (MLM) group Communist Party of the Philippines-New Peoples Army-National Democratic Front (CPP-NPA-NDF). The article details the split in the communist left between the Reaffirmist (RA) camp and the Rejectionist (RJ) camp and the violent purges the CPP-NPA-NDF committed on their own members. Note as well that “Armando Liwanag” is a *nom de guerre* of Jose Maria “Joma” Sison.

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