

People's struggles in Latin Asia - IV - Philippines, protests, 1950s-1972

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The French original had to be much shortened because of editorial constraints (thus, some few corrections have been introduced here). An even longer version is now under preparation and will be posted online in French... as soon as possible.

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[**People's struggles in Latin Asia - II - Philippines, protest during the US era**](#)

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After the defeat of the Huk's revolutionary struggle in the Philippines, progressive politics focused on the moderate nationalism of Claro M. Recto. However, in the late 1960s, with a new wave of youth radicalization, communist groups took back the political initiative, before they split sharply over the Sino-Soviet conflict.

Nationalism of Claro M. Recto

In the 1950s a moderate, unstructured, nationalist movement formed around the lawyer Carlo M. Recto and progressively radicalized. He introduced a critical vision of the subordination of the Philippines vis-à-vis the United States beyond the groups traditionally influenced by the left. He adopted the theme cherished by Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru - “Asia for the Asians” - identifying internationally with the non-aligned camp. Recto entered into conflict with the Catholic

Church when he urged that the works of Jose Rizal (which contained attacks against the friars) be part of the compulsory syllabus of universities and colleges.

In a time of repression, Recto helped create a space within which social resistance could be expressed. Nevertheless, radical unions such as the Congress of Labor Organizations (CLO) suffered when conditions were created to favor a unionism of class collaboration with the adoption of the Minimum Wage Act in 1951, the Industrial Peace Act in 1954, and procedures of collective bargaining centered on enterprise. A Jesuit, Father Walter Hogan, initiated the constitution of the Federation of Free Workers (FFW) in 1950 and the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) in 1953. With the help of American institutions, the Asian Labor Education Center (University of the Philippines) was founded in 1954, and later the Institute of Social Order (Ateneo de Manila University).

In September 1954 the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty was signed in Manila. The Philippines and Thailand were the only founding members from the region of SEATO. Recto abstained on this issue in the Senate. He opposed sending troops to Vietnam and denounced, in the Philippines, the extraterritorial de facto right benefiting the Americans.

During the presidency of Carlo P. Garcia (elected in 1957 after the accidental death of Magsaysay), the Philippine capital was able to consolidate in various sectors like pharmacy, food, and wood. However, in 1961, Diosdado Macapagal became president. He attacked the nationalist legacy of Recto and Garcia. He announced the restoration of free enterprise, reestablished good relations with the United States, and ended protectionist measures. It was the start of “dependant industrialization” under the tutelage of the IMF and World Bank. At the same time, in order to reduce social tensions, Macapagal launched an agrarian reform program: it included progressive measures, but also many exemptions, legal loopholes, and lack of financing, which considerably reduced its significance. The political impact of this program was nevertheless felt. Without a sufficiently solid popular base, the nationalist current of Claro M. Recto was unable to past the test.

Birth of New Militant Organizations

The American hold over the Philippines, the social upheavals provoked by capitalist development, and the direct implication of the country in the Indochina war gave way to a new wave of radicalism with a strong anti-imperialist character. Beginning in the 1960s, new militant organizations emerged in all the main social sectors: wage earners, peasants, and youth (not only student youth). They denounced American imperialism. They closely linked national and social issues. They combined cultural nationalism (the difficult search for Philippine identity), political nationalism (against foreign interference), and popular nationalism (mass struggles were considered a prerequisite to the creation of a relationship of forces favorable to liberation). Revolutionary nationalism was seen as a field where unity between movements and sectors could be achieved.

With the revival of communist influence, an intense political conflict developed within the left around three emblematic personalities: Jose Lava (who was freed from jail in 1970) of the PKP (Communist Party of the Philippines [1]), Luis Taruc (freed in 1968) - who then identified with social Christianity - and a young newcomer, Jose Maria Sison, who was born in 1939 and quickly appeared as one of the main figures of the 1960s militant generation. The adoption by Luis Taruc, and later by Jose Lava, of the “peaceful” or “parliamentary” road was initially a tactical answer to the decline and defeat of armed struggle. The evolution of the international situation helped give a more general ideological content to this political choice. The bloody repression in 1965-6 of the Indonesian Communist Party and of all progressive movements had a deep impact in the Philippine left, not only because of the geographical proximity of the two archipelagos, but also because the PKI had been a

key reference for the militants. The Indonesian bloodbath contributed to the demoralization of former PKP leaders, while it convinced many revolted youngsters of the absurdity of peaceful means.

Significant developments occurred in the labor and peasant movements. However, contrary to the political passivity of students in the 1950s, youth were a key element of the radicalization of the 1960s and early 1970s. Mobilizations began in the University of the Philippines (UP) on the occasion of a nationalist and anti-clerical campaign. New militant organizations were created during this whole decade. At first, they often embodied all the components of the Philippine left, which was then in contact with its radical counterpart in Europe and the United States. More than in the past, it was a pluralist left, with the presence of anti-Stalinist Marxists or Christian socialists.

The PKP – the “old” Communist Party – was hoping to take advantage of this militant revival to reorganize itself, but part of its youth sector, led by Jose Maria Sison, split off. The principal confrontation was then the Kabataan Makabayan (KM, Patriotic Youth) of Sison and the Samahan ng Demokratikong Kabataan (SDK, Union of Democratic Youth) of Sixto Carlos on one side, and the Malayang Pagkakaisa ng Kabataang Pilipino (MPKP, Free Association of Filipino Youth) and the Bertrand Russell Foundation (Philippine Council), with Francisco Nemenzo Jr. as chairman, on the other.

Ideological confrontation was progressively framed by the Sino-Soviet conflict: the PKP eventually joined the pro-Moscow camp, while Jose Maria Sison won over the radical left to Maoism. In 1968 his new party was officially founded on Mao Zedong’s birthday (December 26). Its full name was Communist Party of the Philippines Marxist-Leninist Mao Tsetung Thought (CPP-MLMTT). To differentiate it from the “former” Communist Party – PKP in Tagalog – it is known under the English initials of CPP. Beginning in 1969, Bernabe Buscayno brought to the CPP a group of young Huks of the second generation.

From FQS to Martial Law

Two years after the French May ’68 events and the uprisings on US and Mexican campuses, the student struggle took a radical turn in the Philippines. A rally was brutally suppressed on January 26, 1970. On January 30 four students were killed and many more wounded during a demonstration: the Battle of Mendiola (from the name of the bridge leading to Malacanang Palace, the presidential palace) initiated three months of occupation of campuses and repeated demonstrations with tens of thousands of militants – three months of intense mobilization known in the history of the archipelago as the First Quarter Storm (FQS).

The student struggles knew other high points, like the Diliman Commune, a one-week occupation of the campus of the University of Philippines in Quezon City, in February 1971. The KM attracted student radicalism, but it also oriented it outside the university. It enjoined students to go to the masses, to learn from them and to prepare for a rural armed struggle. This did not constitute an option for the student movement as a whole. The FQS was thus followed by a period of stagnation during which the radical left lost numerous positions in university elections. The movement represented by Sison was on the rise, but political space still remained open to other trends on the left.

Everything changed on September 21, 1972. Already elected twice, Ferdinand Marcos should have given way to another presidential candidate: the Philippine constitution did not allow a president to present himself for a third consecutive mandate. To stay in power, he chose to impose martial law. Thus, he opened a new chapter in the history of the country and of the popular struggles.

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References and Suggested Readings

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* On the International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest, see on ESSF:

[The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest - 1500 to the Present](#)

[A presentation of the "International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest: 1500 to the Present"](#)

Footnotes

[1] Correction from the prited version: not "Filipino Communist Party".