

Muddying the Revolution? - On political killings by the CPP

Monday 3 September 2018, by [DE JONG Alex](#) (Date first published: 2 September 2018).

We should be honest about the Communist Party of the Philippines' record, including its assassinations of left-wing activists.

Denis Rogatyuk's Interview [\[1\]](#) with José Mariá Sison is remarkable for what it does not address. Among the issues the article ignores are the Communist Party of the Philippines' history of killing its leftist critics, and Sison's part in this policy of murder.

Officially, Jose Maria Sison has no position in the CPP, but is political advisor to its diplomatic wing, the National-Democratic Front (NDF). But there is no doubt [\[2\]](#) the "Armando Liwanag" who became chair of the CPP in the late eighties was Sison [\[3\]](#), restored to this position after release from prison. By now, it is well known (but not admitted). As a representative of the NDF, an organisation under control of the party, Sison has always fully supported the actions of the CPP. From their side, the party pays respect to him as the ideologue of their movement. The CPP's politics are those of Sison, and vice versa. Sison is not the sole leader of the CPP but no matter his official status, he still has considerable influence over it.

Today, this organisation is very different from what it was in its heyday, in the mid-eighties. During the nineties, the CPP went through a series of acrimonious splits after the faction around Sison blocked the organisation of a party-congress and ended debates over political strategy by imposing a return to Maoist orthodoxy. When it stabilized at the end of the decade, the party was much more homogeneous and tighter organized than before.

It was during this decade that the CPP started its policy [\[4\]](#) of assassinating other leftists and former members [\[5\]](#). Dozens of assassinations and assassination-attempts have been recorded [\[6\]](#). Most of them happen in the remote areas where the CPP's armed wing, the New People's Army (NPA), is strongest. Information is difficult to gather and people are afraid to come forward, especially when they lack the protection of a strong organisation. Better known are the killings in 2008 of several peasant activists linked to the social-democratic Akbayan party [\[7\]](#). Other victims included members of the Maoist Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines, the Revolutionary Workers Party-Mindanao and other groups.

These murders are politically motivated; the CPP attacks people because of their activism. For example, one of the peasant organisers killed in 2008 had been told to cease his attempts to have the government's bill on land reform implemented in his area. His activism went against CPP strategy which asserts that attempts at land reform should wait until the eve of their future nationwide seizure of power. The logic behind the CPP's attacks was further made explicit in their refusal [\[8\]](#) of the MLPP's offer of a ceasefire. There could be no ceasefire because, a CPP spokesperson replied, the MLPP was also a revolutionary organisation with an armed wing - hence, it was "muddying the revolution".

The CPP is the dominant organisation of the Philippine Left, and it uses lethal violence to maintain its position. Sison and the NDF defend this assassination policy. For them, there is only one genuine left in the Philippines; the CPP and its legal and underground allies. All who disagree politically with this "National-Democratic" movement are at best labelled "pseudo-progressive", and often "counter-revolutionary".

French socialist and solidarity activist Pierre Rousset wrote several articles [9] about the background of the killings. In his words, the CPP's policy targets the "whole independent Left and popular movements, whether reformist or revolutionary"; "the real "context" which helps us understand the assassinations is the will of the CPP-NPA-NDF to impose its monopoly of power above the people's movement."

Around 2005, the issue attracted international attention. Around that time, the CPP killed a number of prominent former members and published an overview of so-called "counter-revolutionaries" in the Philippines and their supposed international links. The list included most of the non-National Democratic Philippine left. (Organisations of which I am part, the Fourth International and the International Institute for Research and Education, were included among the international counter-revolutionary links). Some of the people mentioned had already been killed, but others are still alive, among them the well-known activist Walden Bello [10]. The killings and threats were condemned among many others by international organisations such as some 140 participants to the World Social Forum [11], and Focus on the Global South [12]. The European United Left-Nordic Green Left group in the European Parliamentary broke its links with Bayan Muna, the National-Democrats most prominent parliamentary organisation [13].

These protests forced the CPP to stop targeting well known, aboveground, figures of the broad left. But local and underground cadres are still at risk. Today, in the southern island of Mindanao, which is under Martial Law, specifically peace-activists in indigenous communities are under threat from both the army and the NPA.

Sison and the NDF continue to claim the CPP has a right to sentence people in its "people's courts". They justify the killings with unproven accusations that often blend together charges of complicity with government forces, ordinary crimes and personal attacks. Their response to international criticism is similar. Rousset for example was accused of cooperating with the CIA [14].

The killings perpetrated by the NPA are the most serious elision, but the interview omits other crucial questions as well. One example: there is an allusion to Sison suggesting Philippine president Duterte could be a Chávez-like figure. But Sison was not just simply wrong in his assessment of what Duterte's presidency would be like - he helped to bring it about. During the campaigning period, Sison spoke highly of Duterte [15], claimed a Duterte presidency would be good for "national unity" [16] and, unique in Philippine history, had (via Skype) a publicized sympathetic talk with the presidential candidate. During the same period, the NPA released several POW's to Duterte's, further bolstering his claim he would be able to reach a peace-agreement with them. All this helped create sympathy for Duterte among the National-Democratic mass base.

After Duterte became president, Sison called for a 'critical honeymoon period' [17] between Duterte and the National-Democrats. Sison suggested that Duterte would soon [18] sign an agreement with the NDF and implement far-reaching social reforms [19]. The CPP spoke of an "alliance" being forged between it and the president. Leading figures from the Nation-Democratic movement entered the cabinet, despite the rapidly escalating violence of the "war on drugs".

This violence did not come as a surprise. From the late eighties on, Duterte was the mayor of Davao City. Long before he became president, he organized a death-squad [20] that murdered

hundreds [21], mostly petty criminals, drug addicts and street children. Despite this, Duterte [22] and National-Democratic leaders cultivated cordial links. During his campaign, Duterte made it clear that he wanted to extend his death-squad policy on a nation-wide scale. Sison saw in this no reason not to support him.

This is because for Sison and other National-Democratic leaders, human rights are a political tool, used when it suits them. When MLPP members were tortured, the Nation-Democratic Human Rights groups refused to support them. One of the most prominent National-Democratic cabinet members, former Social Welfare Secretary Judy Taguiwalo, in May 2017 [23] still claimed that the killings happening as part of his "war on drugs" went against the wishes of Duterte [24].

The total death count of Duterte's "war on drugs" is in the thousands and is still increasing [25]. Sison carries part of the responsibility for this.

The international left should support Philippine leftists when they are threatened by the state, or by the NPA. While denouncing the many human rights violations [26] committed by the Philippine state, we should also pressure the CPP and its allies to renounce the killings, and recognize the legitimacy of pluralism on the left. One positive development was that during the latest protest on the occasion of Duterte's State of the Nation Address different groups, including above ground allies of the ND's, mobilized together. And on May 1, labour organisations allied with the ND's rallied together with groups from other political backgrounds. Such unity in action has rarely been possible before.

Among younger activists, there is a chance to spread a more pluralistic culture. As an international left, we need to support this development instead of turning a blind eye to crimes committed by the CPP.

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Footnotes

[1] <https://jacobinmag.com/2018/07/communist-party-philippines-sison-duterte>

[2] <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/202-the-communist-insurgency-in-the-philippines-tactics-and-talks.pdf>

[3] https://books.google.nl/books?id=NS9bDwAAQBAJ&pg=PA30&lpg=PA30&dq=kathleen+weekly+armando+liwanag+sison&source=bl&ots=_F_6o6dBXH&sig=dDwe4ftHVGXDHCvRe1n0FUueeqI&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjE1emehs7cAhVMb1AKHZ4gAFsQ6AEwAXoECAkQAQ#v=onepage&q=By now, it is well known (but not admitted&f=false

[4] <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article616>

[5] <https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?rubrique14>

[6] <https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article20>

[7] ESSF (article 12022), [An urgent call to the National Democratic Front and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines regarding the recent killings of farmers!](https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article12022):

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article12022>

[ESSF (article 10937), [Open Letter to the NPA General Command and the National Democratic Front](https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article10937):

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article10937>

ESSF (article 10830), [Killings of two farmers in Hacienda Batuan, Masbate: the NPA suspected](https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article10830):

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article10830>

ESSF (article 9568), [Assassination of farmer left activists by the NPA](https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article9568):

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article9568>

ESSF (article 11166), [Philippines: Akbayan says NPA has blood on their hands](https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article11166):

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article11166>

[8] ESSF (article 11166), [Philippines: Akbayan says NPA has blood on their hands](https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article46):

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article46>

[9] ESSF (article 69), [The CPP-NPA-NDF "Hit List": A preliminary report](http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article616), also in IVP:

<http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article616>

ESSF (article 72), [What can we learn from Fidel Agcaoili's "Rejoinder"?](http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/article.php3?id_article=778), also in IVP:

http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/article.php3?id_article=778

[10] <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/06/walden-bello-philippines-duterte-dignidad-coalition-akbayan/>

also available on ESSF (article 38348), [Philippines: The Left Under Duterte](https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article88)

ESSF (article 88), [Yes, they will probably get me at some point, but...](https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article88):

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article88>

[11] ESSF (article 67), [Statement of Concern in the WSF 2005 on the threat of violence in the resolution of political differences](https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article67):

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article67>

[12] ESSF (article 73), [A Statement of Concern about a Hit-list including Walden Bello and other Activists](https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article73):

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article73>

[13] ESSF (article 42), [Letter to Satur Ocampo \(Bayan Muna\)](https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article42):

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article42>

ESSF (article 45), [Letter to Francis Wurtz \(GUE/NGL\)](https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article45):

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article45>

ESSF (article 41), [Letter to Satur Ocampo \(Bayan Muna\)](https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article41):

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article41>

[14] ESSF (article 72), [What can we learn from Fidel Agcaoili's "Rejoinder"?](http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/article.php3?id_article=778), also in IVP:

http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/article.php3?id_article=778

[15] <https://josemariasison.org/interview-with-prof-jose-maria-sison-on-the-election-of-duterte-as-president/>

- [16] <http://globalnation.inquirer.net/139123/joma-sison-duterte-victory-good-for-national-unity>
- [17] <http://news.abs-cbn.com/halalan2016/focus/05/18/16/why-joma-sison-backs-critical-left-honey-moon-with-duterte>
- [18] <http://davaotoday.com/main/politics/joma-says-duterte-most-open-to-cooperation/>
- [19] <http://news.abs-cbn.com/halalan2016/nation/04/27/16/joma-sison-eyes-ceasefire-return-to-ph-if-duterte-wins>
- [20] <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/171312-timeline-davao-death-squad-probe-hearing-investigations-rodrigo-duterte>
- [21] <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/04/06/you-can-die-any-time/death-squad-killings-mindanao>
- [22] <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/05/philippines-duterte-populism-marcos-neoliberalism>
also available on ESSF (article 38075), [Rodrigo Duterte, The Philippines' New Strongman](#).
- [23] <https://www.rappler.com/nation/168701-ca-suspends-taguiwalo-confirmation-cpp-ndf-npa>
- [24] <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/investigative/beginning-war-on-drugs-philippines>
- [25] <https://www.rappler.com/nation/208009-duterte-war-on-drugs-chilling>
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/07/philippines-duterte-vows-continue-chilling-war-drugs-180723180900751.html>
- [26] <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/jul/21/philippines-lives-land-lost-coffee-empire-militarised-politics>