

# The “Left Purges” and their implications to Human Rights

Saturday 15 February 2003, by [ILAGAN, Bonifacio](#) (Date first published: 15 February 2003).

**Delivered for the third lecture of the first international exhibition of “Anne Frank-A History for Today”; 15 February 2003, San Agustin Museum, Intramuros, Manila.**

By Bonifacio P. Ilagan  
(Chair, First Quarter Storm Movement)

Magandang hapon po.

One afternoon about two weeks ago, my phone rang and there was a lady’s gracious voice that said she was someone from the Dutch embassy. I quickly performed a memory scan. Was there something I had recently done that could be connected, even remotely, to The Netherlands or its embassy in the Philippines..? There was none, to the best of my recollection.

And then, quickly, too, a name crossed my mind. Ah, yes! Jose Maria Sison! In 1994, a team of the Philippine National Police and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) arrested and tortured me and seven of my friends in Benguet. We were charged with illegal possession of firearms and explosives. But the provincial prosecutor, who was an enlightened man and who knew the law as it should be, didn’t quite agree with our captors. He threw out the stupid charge, asserting the fact that the firearms and explosives were somebody else’s, not ours.

Mr. Sison was in The Netherlands at the time - he’s still there, unless evidence had been finally unearthed to prove that he, Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein are engaging in teleconferences and exchanging text messages. Anyway... the media interviewed Mr. Sison about us, the Benguet detainees. He commented that we were leaders of the mass movement in the Philippines, and that there was only one among the detainees whom he personally knew, and it was I.

And so, even as I told the lady from the Dutch embassy that I was the one he wanted to talk to, I was already prepared to admit that, yes, I know Mr. Sison. And no, he is not a terrorist.

But the lady didn’t ask about Mr. Sison. She said instead that I was being invited to speak in connection with the Anne Frank exhibition, and would I want to talk about the “Left purges” and its implications to human rights”. As she explained, I surmised that I was a second or third choice. What a poor choice I was, I told her. Now, to make a long story short, after a couple of days, I said yes to the embassy lady but informed her that I was on the lookout for a replacement. Until yesterday, that was what I was telling her.

Three points cause my anxiety even as I talk to you now.

## **The “Left Purge”**

My first discomfort concerns the way the phenomenon in question is described: “Left purge.”

The term "Left purge" has a peculiar and resonant witch-hunting ring to it. It is not exactly fair to those who are anti-imperialists, democrats and communists who come under the rubric of the Left. It is not in the nature of the Left to "purge" - as in to cleanse its organizations or offices by going on a killing spree. "Left" and "purge" combined induce thoughts of murderous orgies and other Satanic deeds.

When I was a young boy, I remember being warned of evil characters, called communists, who went about town carrying oversized sacks where they throw in children who did not want to take a bath or the afternoon nap. Communists, the warning continued, also collected old people, pounded them until they become powdered crystals to be used as taste enhancers, something like the popular Vetsin. That, for you, is monosodium glutamate.

So in my copy of this speech, I prudently enclose Left Purges in quotation marks.

The First Quarter Storm Movement or FQS Movement, for one, has always been proud of its radical Left tradition. The FQS Movement is an organization of activists during the late 1960s until 1972 prior to the declaration of martial law. We are still activists today, in spite of the process of aging. As I was saying, our radical Left tradition has made the members of the FQS Movement become steadfast nationalists, national-democrats, internationalists, working-class partisans. It has kept them clear-headed in the onslaught of myriad ideas about how to pursue service to the people, national identity, freedom, social transformation, et cetera.

### **Imaginary Ghosts: Kampanyang Ahos**

The second reason for our discomfort is our limited eligibility to answer the guide questions that accompanied the invitation. While we can, in some measure, reply, it would be on the basis of research and study, rather than of personal experience and firsthand knowledge.

You see, unlike Messrs. Robert "Bobby" Garcia and Manuel "Steve" Quiambao, we cannot claim that we were actually there when it happened.

But we in the FQS Movement persist in being keen students of politics and social movements in the Philippines. And we note with great concern the campaigns to "flush out suspected deep penetration agents of the AFP in the CPP-NPA." These constitute the so-called Left purges in the revolutionary movement. The three major ones were Kampanyang Ahos or Kahos, also called the anti-Zombies campaign, in Mindanao; Operation Missing Link or OPML in the Southern Tagalog region; and Olympia in the National Capital Region. Please do not accuse us of maliciously withholding information about "Kadena de Amor" in the Quezon-Bikol Zone and about some other campaign, because we really have not gone that far in our research.

Launched by the leadership of the CPP in Mindanao in July 1985, Kampanyang Ahos was "*a widespread anti-infiltration campaign that had been supposedly stopped by the Mindanao Commission in December 1985 but continued and even ran wild in one region up to March 1986.*" About 1,500 cadres, fighters, activists and ordinary peasants were arrested, interrogated and punished without sufficient and strong basis. Alleged to have been executed were an unbelievable 900. The figures I mentioned are the highest estimates we have come across.

Allow me to quote the Central Committee of the CPP on the matter of the Mindanao anti-infiltration campaign to reveal how serious it measured the event:

*"The Ahos campaign perpetrated grievous violations of the individual rights of the suspects, the standards of due process and the rules of scientific examination and weighing of evidence. The cases were formulated, investigated, judged and concluded through methods and processes that were*

*extremely subjectivist, haphazard, arbitrary and defective. Torture was extensively used on the fallacious ground that the victims were enemy spies, in a situation that the suspects were presumed guilty even if the suspicions usually stood on the flimsiest ground.*

“The Ahos campaign was spurred by panic from unproven apprehensions regarding an extensive and long-running infiltration by the enemy. Such apprehensions were buttressed when worries mounted over growing security problems and losses in the countryside and cities, and at the same time, there had been the previous warning from the central leadership against a wide network of infiltration, there was an enemy campaign of intrigue regarding enemy operatives within the movement and there were reports about so much internal information known to the enemy.”

The incredible belief that an extensive enemy infiltration network was already entrenched in the underground became solidified. The Party leadership in the island was seized by panic when the report and the doubt of one former political detainee reinforced the doubts of the leading cadres themselves in the urban area of one region. Arrests were immediately made. Those arrested were tortured. To stop the torture, they made “confessions” that incriminated themselves, as well as others.

*“The belief finally turned into hysteria when the arrests, torture, confessions and subjectivist judgment led to an ever widening scale and ever rising level, fueled each other, eroded mutual trust, ran over the integrity and the organizational processes of the Party and shook entire organizations of the Party.*

“The Ahos campaign occurred under conditions of intense life-and-death struggle with the reactionary enemy. It was conducted under the mistaken belief of defending the Party and the revolution against enemy infiltrators.”

In spite of the CPP principles and rules that should have guided the Mindanao Party leaders *“in ferreting out and eliminating informers and infiltrators . . . these were not sufficiently studied, disseminated and impressed in thought and practice.”* The CPP itself admitted that *“there had been a history of carelessness and immaturity in the handling of such matters within the Party.”*

“The damage created by the Ahos campaign is extensive and sizeable. Many Party and army cadres up to the regional and front levels were arrested and punished. Many more left or fled because they came under suspicion, became confused or demoralized.

“The resultant devastation was unprecedented in the entire history of the Philippine revolution. Never has the enemy inflicted as much damage as this to the revolutionary forces in so short a period of time.

“In its 10<sup>th</sup> plenum, the Central Committee of the CPP declared that the violation of the rights and the victimization of Party cadres and members and NPA fighters during Kampanyang Ahos . . . were serious crimes against the Party and the revolution and imposed appropriate heavy sanctions. It approved a set of even stricter rules on the investigation and trial of suspected enemy spies.”

Likewise, it also entertained *“the possibility of granting amnesty to those with grave accountabilities. In this regard, prevailing circumstances were taken into consideration, especially the erroneous influences and views which were allowed to blind them and cloud their judgment.”*

“As a condition (for amnesty), they were to make thoroughgoing rectification, earnestly ask forgiveness from the victims and make an all-out effort to repair the damage suffered by individuals, families and the organization.”

The CPP says, in conclusion, *“Most of the intermediate cadres in Mindanao (who were) involved in Kampanyang Aho have already accounted for their responsibilities and have redeemed themselves by continuing their sincere service to the people and the revolutionary struggle. But some former top leaders of the CPP Mindanao Commission who were actively behind Kampanyang Aho have not only betrayed the revolution but also continue to avoid their individual accountabilities.”*

We note that among these former top leaders were Mr. Garcia’s interviewees in his book.

### **Truth-Seeking Gone Mad: OPML**

On the other hand, in 1988 in Southern Tagalog, the anti-infiltration campaign was propelled by the desire of the CPP regional committee to discover the cause of the capture and “salvaging” of many cadres in 1977 by the AFP. The campaign was dubbed Operation Missing Link (OPML).

I took a special interest in OPML because my younger sister Rizalina was among those who were arrested by the AFP in 1977. Until now, I have yet to find her body. But there have been reports about her being gang-raped and eventually killed by her AFP captors. It has been 25 years since she disappeared. In all likelihood, the reports could be true.

How could an earnest desire to find out about the tragedy of my sister and her companions have led to an even greater folly that was the OPML?

Regarding this matter, let me quote some statements of the CPP Central Committee:

*“The Executive Committee (of the CPP) came to its senses when it entered Southern Tagalog in November 1988 and directly witnessed the gross errors in the judgment, interrogation and treatment of those arrested. It immediately ordered a stop to the entire campaign and led the review of the cases, the summing-up of the events and the formulation of clear guidelines on the basis of the bitter experience.*

*“In the thoroughgoing review conducted on all cases in general and on each individual case, the (review) committee came to the conclusion that there was no solid basis to suspect and arrest the 55 comrades who were accused of being enemy infiltrators. All the more, there was no basis whatsoever, for the execution of a number of them. Those who were detained were ordered released and given assistance in their rehabilitation. We asked for their understanding and forgiveness and encouraged them to continue helping the revolution.”*

We note the discrepancy in the number of the victims. Some sources say that among the more than a hundred persons who were arrested, 66 or 67 had been killed.

In any event, in its own investigation into the OPML, the CPP central leadership concluded that *“the indiscriminate arrest, cases of torture and execution of comrades suspected of being enemy infiltrators was hysteria in its extreme, and a grave error. It was condemned by the Party’s central leadership as a direct violation of the rights of the victims who were upright cadres and members of the Party and fighters of the New People’s Army; detrimental to the organizations of the Party and people’s army and to the revolutionary mass base in the larger context; and a serious violation of the Party’s principles, policies and processes.”*

The CPP has claimed that its *“conclusions and rectification measures were accepted by most of OPML’s victims. They were restored to their former positions and levels of responsibility. Those among them who were not ready to return to the Party chose to leave the Party in the meantime even as they continued to support the revolutionary movement.”*

It further said, *"All leading comrades who had individual accountabilities concerning the OPML anti-infiltration hysteria were meted various levels of disciplinary action, the highest being expulsion from the Party. Most of them fully acknowledged their errors, accepted the disciplinary action meted on them, gave their all in repairing the damage that had been wrought and made rectification. All those involved were assisted in their rehabilitation, including those who did not have serious accountabilities. Loyal comrades who were responsible for OPML continue today in their tasks after having served the disciplinary actions imposed on them."*

As in Kampanyang Ahos, *"OPML resulted, on one hand, from the intense life-and-death struggle between the forces of the reactionary state and the armed revolution; and, on the other, from grave subjectivism that resulted in serious disorientation, errors and setbacks that in the end, led to extreme suspiciousness made worse by erroneous views on, and methods of, investigation and prosecution."*

The CPP declares that *"the thoroughgoing rectification of all this is the very reason behind the Second Great Rectification Movement which the Party initiated in 1992 and successfully completed in the early part of 1999."*

### **Rhyme and Reason Gone Awry: Olympia**

Olympia, the third major anti-infiltration campaign, is being claimed by some as a nationwide campaign that was launched in 1988 by no less than the CPP central leadership. The claim is made to push the argument that, instead of putting a stop to the "bloody purges," the CPP central leadership in fact condoned and made them worse by elevating them as a national mass movement covering Central Luzon, Cordillera, Leyte, Cebu and the National Capital Region. Our research shows that this claim is incorrect — and malicious. Olympia was in fact directed at flushing out military agents in the national organs of the CPP that were based in Metro Manila.

Again, here is what the CPP said:

*"After some months and the first wave of arrests, the Executive Committee (of the CPP) directly involved itself in assessing the 'whole design of the enemy infiltration' by putting together patches of information drawn from the interrogations, which had not been carefully analyzed and examined. To prevent the campaign from getting out of hand, a set of rules on deciding and undertaking the arrest, interrogation and investigation was drawn up... All these were made within the framework of what was believed to have been a wide enemy infiltration network and a gradually creeping sense of panic. Selected territorial cadres were alerted about what had been 'discovered' as an infiltration network."*

*"Along with its self-criticism, the Executive Committee also immediately ordered a stop to (Olympia), directly reviewed the key cases and set the steps for a continuation of the review and for rectification. However, before the campaigns could be halted, these had already created serious damage and disorder in the organization and in our relations with the masses and allies in some areas and sectors."*

From Metro Manila, the Olympia detainees were transferred to an NPA camp somewhere in Northern Luzon. Our research showed that about 12 to 15 had been arrested under Olympia. No one was killed, although some overeager detention officers employed a certain degree of torture.

### **Knowing the Error and Rectifying: Implications to Human Rights**

The Political Bureau (Politburo) of the CPP, meeting in 1989, reviewed the two anti-infiltration campaigns (OPML and Olympia). The fatal error was traced to *"panic, a siege mentality, grave*

*subjectivism and unbridled suspicion, violation of the rights of the suspects, wrong views and methods of investigation and prosecution, and carelessness in the investigation and weighing of facts and circumstances.”* The Politburo adopted a clearer and stricter set of rules on investigation and prosecution of suspected infiltrators.

It also agreed, as part of the rectification movement, to review all anti-infiltration campaigns and to correct past wrong judgments and excesses; as well as the general conduct of investigation, prosecution and judgment of informers and criminals; and the continued refinement of the guide and rules for the revolutionary system of justice. It emphasized the importance of widespread education among the ranks of cadres and members regarding the principles of humane treatment of captives, respect for the rights of individuals and the revolutionary system of justice.

The CPP has declared that the comrades who were sacrificed in the so-called anti-infiltration campaigns were martyrs of the revolution. The Party humbly sought out their families in order to conduct self-criticism, explain what occurred and the underlying context, ask for their forgiveness and understanding, give some form of compensatory damages and encourage their continued support for the revolution.

To date, not all the families of the victims have been reached. This is not due to any devious design to keep the tragic events a secret as claimed by Messrs. Garcia and Quiambao, particularly in the news item that appeared in the papers last Feb 12. And by the way, Mr. Quiambao was never the “head of the CPP national secretariat” as published in the *Inquirer*. Our research showed that there was, in fact, no such CPP organ as a “national secretariat.”

There are many reasons to be cited for the inability of the CPP to cover as much ground as one wished. One is the scarcity of information about the families’ whereabouts, especially of those who have died. Another reason is the withholding of information by some of those who were gravely responsible for the crimes and who opted to bolt the CPP, taking the information with them. Mr. Garcia has interviewed some of them in his book. Still another reason is the wish of some survivors not to tell their own families.

### **Matinding Kahibangan Condemned, Martyrs Saluted**

Matinding kahibangan (“extreme hysteria”) was how the CPP central leadership described the series of the tragic anti-infiltration campaigns.

In the strongest possible sense, the FQS Movement likewise condemns this aberration in the revolutionary practice of the Left and takes relief in the fact that the CPP has equally condemned it and has drawn lessons from it. Its assessment of the phenomenon is now part and parcel of the education program of the whole Party, the New People’s Army and the National Democratic Front.

The extensive quotations that we gathered from various CPP documents and utilized in this paper are all meant to reveal that the central leadership of the Party did not absolve itself of the responsibility, of the errors and weaknesses.

And then, too, to guard against a recurrence of this hysteria, the central leadership of the Party issued in November 1988 a document on *“the principles and methods of investigation, trial and evaluation of evidence”* and the *“rules in the investigation and prosecution of enemy spies in December 1989.”* These are aimed at strengthening the guarantees of civil rights that are in the Bill of Rights of the Rules for Establishing the People’s Government and the guarantees of due process in the Constitution of the Party and the Rules of the New People’s Army.”

*“When we forget lessons from our own history,”* says the CPP, *“we are bound to repeat the errors.”*

In that spirit, it has derived many lessons from Kampanyang Ahos, OPML, Olympia and the other erroneous campaigns. *“These lessons are extremely relevant especially in terms of gathering, studying and weighing evidence and testimony, ensuring the implementation of the correct processes and respect for human rights. These lessons are being utilized in continually improving the revolutionary justice system and are regarded by the Party as extremely important in the all-sided advance and strengthening of the revolutionary movement and struggle.”*

Let me take this occasion to reiterate the clarification issued by the CPP regarding the role of its spokesperson, Gregorio “Ka Roger” Rosal in the OPML, and I quote:

*“Mr. Manuel Quiambao recently alleged that Ka Roger has direct criminal and personal accountabilities in the implementation of the anti-infiltration hysteria in Southern Tagalog in 1988... On the other hand, (Rodolfo) Salas claims that Ka Roger was one of two persons who initiated and led OPML. Salas was in prison at that time and has no personal knowledge of the facts. In any case, the Central Committee refutes the statements made by Quiambao and Salas.*

“Ka Roger, who was in the leading committee of the Party in Southern Tagalog at that time, was issued a stern warning for his part in some of the minor decisions regarding OPML. Up to now, he continues to accept with humility, his responsibility to make rectification and relate and explain the matter to comrades and the masses. However, he had no major responsibility in OPML. He was not a member of Task Force Missing Link that was composed of members of the Party’s regional leadership tasked with implementing OPML; and was not even in the area during most of the time that OPML was being implemented. Contrary to Quiambao’s claims, Ka Roger had no direct participation in the execution or torture of any of the victims of OPML.”

The FQS Movement salutes all the victims of the anti-infiltration campaigns that happened in the course of the revolutionary struggle. They are indeed martyrs of the people. We are one with them in seeking justice and ensuring that never again should Kampanyang Ahos, OPML, Olympia, Kadena de Amor and the like happen to trample upon human rights, life and dignity, and wreak havoc on the people’s movement for freedom, justice and democracy.

We are especially humbled by those who suffered untold pain and bitterness in this matinding kahibangan yet retraced the path to the revolutionary movement and are now back in the arms of the people to confront the real enemy of human rights, peace and prosperity.

Maraming maraming salamat po.