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Of Hitlists and Diagrams

Padayon's Response to the Ang Bayan article "Links of Counterrevolutionary Groups with Trotskyites and Social Democrats" (1)

Friday 7 October 2005, by [Padayon](#) (Date first published: April 2005).

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"Force can be employed against enemies, but not against a part of one's own side which once wishes rapidly to assimilate, and whose 'goodwill' one needs." (2)

Antonio Gramsci

The very first thing that must be established in the ongoing "controversy" regarding the 7 December 2004 Ang Bayan article entitled "Links of Counterrevolutionary Groups with Trotskyites and Social Democrats" is the exact nature and intent of its accompanying diagram. Is it a simple educational tool designed to present "the fragmentation of petty bourgeois anti-communist groups in the Philippines and their... connections with Trotskyite and social democratic groups abroad" ? (3) Or is it already a list of individuals and organizations tagged as class enemies and counterrevolutionaries, and are therefore subject to physical assault and liquidation by units of the NPA?

Written in a didactic monotone, the CPP claims it to be just so-a plain sketch, nay visual aid, so as to better trace the organizational permutations of the various Left political forces in the Philippines which has been affectionately dismissed by its Founding Chairman Jose Maria Sison as mere "grouplets."

What has been remarkable however, despite these tentative gestures of assurances, are the accusatory ideological labels that have been utilized by the article and in the subsequent missives written by Sison and NDFP Negotiating Panel Member Fidel Agcaoili. Such categories reveal a Manichean framework in interpreting the current dynamics within the Philippine Left-presenting the CPP-NPA-NDF as the only genuine and pristine revolutionary organization and denouncing all the rest (PADAYON included) as either sullied by social democratic reformism or pseudo-revolutionary Trotskyite tendencies.

Flawed and Fatal Assumption

By labeling other groups as such, the CPP has practically reserved for itself the task of examining the character of each and every actor within the Philippine Left, based on a standard that only they themselves are aware of. Such a bloated self-image of the Communist Party comes from the ludicrous assumption that they possess the monopoly of knowledge and foresight that could correctly determine (with near-mathematical precision) the motives, ideological orientation and subsequent practical consequences of the actions of their competitors.

This then sets the stage for their physical comeuppance preceded by the use of foul language and verbal abuse reminiscent of the Great Inquisition and the Stalinist purges of the 1930s.

Reform and Revolution: Dichotomy or Continuum?

Partly, this murderous mindset of the CPP can be explained by its insistence that the victory of the national democratic revolution can never be secured through piecemeal reforms, but through a cataclysmic confrontation between the armed proletariat and the peasantry on the one hand, and the bourgeoisie and the landowning class, on the other. Hence, every reform initiative is deemed as “reformist” which could only damage the overall prospects of the revolutionary movement.

And there is where our main difference with the CPP lie; for **PADAYON does not believe that reform and revolution are two separate instances of hegemonic practice, but as a continuum where reform and revolution becomes practically indistinguishable.** For with every successful reform effort, the people are able to gain concrete measures that weaken the hegemony of the regime and provide the ruled classes with the confidence to further challenge the supremacy of the bourgeois state.

Akin to Gramsci’s notion of the *war of position*, **PADAYON assert that the revolution is not a mere series of episodes characterized by the hail of bullets and clash of arms, but the contingent and gradual process of creating counter-hegemony and of extending democratic control in every sphere of social life.** This is made even more imperative since civil society in the country is very well developed, making the capture of power in a single historical moment impossible.

We would concede however, that reforms may and will definitely be used by the bourgeoisie to placate an insurgent public and perpetuate themselves in power. Gramsci calls this as the passive revolution, characterized by the introduction of “far-reaching modifications in a country’s economic structure from above, through the agency of the state apparatus, without relying on the active participation of the people.” (4)

Hence, the socialist character of any reform measure can only be determined by its primary intent-whether it aims to preserve the status quo or to gradually empower the marginalized classes and sectors so as to prepare for their eventual emancipation.

The More the Merrier

Another point that the CPP has to accept is that the Philippine Left is no longer the united and monolithic movement that it was 30 or 40 years. As their own diagram would show, it is now divided into several tendencies, each of which has a legitimate right to self-existence. Branding these Left

groups and progressive organizations as counter-revolutionaries would only do the socialist cause much harm, especially at this juncture when capitalism seems ascendant which necessitates marshalling our forces.

Gramsci also recognized this need for alliance and coalition-building by asserting that a subordinate societal group can only achieve hegemony by gaining the support of other classes and social forces. This then leads to the formation of a *historical bloc* -the ensemble of class and sectoral alliances as the organized expression of counter-hegemony.

For such an alliance to be viable however, it must be cemented by an ethic based on trust, mutual respect and tolerance for varying modes of ideological analysis. Ergo, **it is not enough to work for the eventual dismemberment of the prevailing power structure; but it is also necessary to recognize the pluralism of the social movement as a precondition for the eventual establishment of a socialist society.**

As Gramsci himself admits:

*"The proletariat can become the leading and dominant class to the extent that it succeeds in **creating a system of alliances which allows it to mobilise the majority of the population against capitalism and the bourgeois state**". (underscoring supplied)*

He however cautions that even the exercise of counter-hegemony can never be total nor arbitrary, "for the fact of hegemony presupposes that accounts be taken of the interests and tendencies of the groups which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed-in other words, that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind." (6)

In other words, the ascendancy of the leading revolutionary force can only be a product of compromise and constant negotiations, sustained by assuming the interests of other subaltern groups and by articulating them as part of its own political agenda.

Coercion and Consent

Given the complex nature of such an alliance, Gramsci asserts that its maintenance can only be guaranteed through the combined use of coercion (which he has dubbed as "domination") and consent, defined as "moral and intellectual leadership." (7)

He further expounds this view by claiming that, "a social group, can and indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to 'lead' as well." (8) Such a distinction was made in order to underscore the need to coerce our class enemies and provide consensual direction to our mass base and progressive allies.

Gramsci therefore avers that **political violence (most especially revolutionary violence) must be employed judiciously** -using it to defend the social movement and as a means to counteract all possible actions from the ruling classes and their reactionary ilk.

However, it is precisely in the realm of consent that the CPP has displayed its greatest bane. **By equating other Left groups as plain class enemies and threatening them with both political and military reprisal, the Party has merely wasted the remaining amount of goodwill that it**

was able to elicit during its difficult struggle against the Marcos dictatorship. It has also resulted in its further isolation from the broad social movement, stifling any possibility of cooperation and alliance work so as to dislodge a common foe.

Ironically, the *Ang Bayan* article directly contravenes the CPP's very own concept of the united front which is supposed to be based on mutual respect and toleration. In fact, as Jose Maria Sison once asserted in an interview with German academic Rainer Werning:

*In the united front, the basic rights and legitimate interests of all patriotic and progressive classes must be blended and harmonized. At the same time, **these various forces must enjoy independence** and initiative. Through democratic consultations and consensus, agreements can be made to promote common interests and fight the common enemy. **Differences and disagreements can be laid aside either because these can be resolved only in due time or can never be resolved. Philosophical and religious differences are respected and tolerated under the principle of freedom of thought and belief**.* (9) (emphasis added)

Since the National Democratic Front (NDF) functions as the most concrete manifestation of the united front concept, Sison (in the same interview) added that:

*...the NDF is not rigid. It is flexible enough to recognize that the **national united front is not limited to its confines and is willing to add other forces and elements outside the NDF framework** to the developing strength of the national united front and the people's government.* (10) (underscoring supplied)

But with the *Ang Bayan* diagram out in the open, it seems that Sison (and all his comrades in the CPP-NPA-NDF) has already repudiated his past public pronouncements.

In a sense, **such overt reliance on military means and political assassinations by the CPP is but a reflection of its desperate attempt to recapture its former hegemonic position in the Philippine Left** and once again assert itself as the most potent revolutionary opposition against the state.

But this method would only deepen the crisis that it is already experiencing, further distancing itself from the broad social movement and the Filipino people as a whole. This predicament of the CPP echoes Gramsci's notion of the crisis of "authority" wherein a former hegemon "has lost its consensus" and is deprived of the necessary mass support, thereby compelling it to rely on the exercise of "coercive force alone" (11) for its immediate political survival.

In effect, the Communist Party has become its most effective gravedigger.

The NPA: A Peasant Army?

It must be remembered that since its Congress of Reestablishment in 26 December 1968, the CPP has projected itself as the most consistent champion of rural justice and the primary advocate of the peasant class. Adopting the thoughts and revolutionary program of Mao Zedong, the Party is supposed to advance an anti-feudal line, seeking the removal of landlord power and the radical redistribution of agricultural lands to the poorest segments of the rural population. As its *Program for a People's Democratic Revolution* explicitly states:

The main content of the people's democratic revolution is the struggle of the peasants for land. The people's democratic revolution must satisfy the basic demands of the poor peasants and farm

workers for land...(It) shall be distributed free to the landless. Usury and all other feudal evils shall be wiped out. Plantations and estates already efficiently operated on a mechanized basis shall be converted into state farms where agricultural workers shall establish proletarian power and provide themselves with better working and living conditions. (12)

To do so, the Party devised a two-stage revolution, i.e. first embarking upon a “national democratic revolution” by overthrowing imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism, before launching the socialist revolution. Such a transitional phase was deemed necessary due to the semi-colonial and semi-feudal character of Philippine society which was marked by the absence of any significant industrial base or of any large urban proletariat. This was emphasized by the CPP’s chief ideologue Amado Guerrero (13) in his book *Philippine Society and Revolution* by claiming that:

Under the present concrete conditions of Philippine society which is semicolonial and semifeudal, the Communist Party has to wage a national-democratic revolution of a new type, a people’s democratic revolution. Though its leadership is proletarian, the Philippine Revolution is not yet a proletarian-socialist revolution...Only after the national-democratic stage has been completed can the proletarian revolutionary leadership carry out the socialist revolution as the transitional stage towards communism. (14)

Guerrero then identified the peasantry as the “main force” of the revolution which would provide the vast majority of Red fighters; while the proletariat and industrial working class will serve as its “leading force,” exercising class leadership and direction in the overall revolutionary enterprise. Based on this analytical schema, the **NPA is therefore envisioned as a peasant army** which would “advance wave upon wave from the countryside” through the strategy of people’s protracted war.

However, since 2003, landless farmers residing in San Narciso, Quezon Province-at the very heart of Bondoc Peninsula-have reported cases of NPA atrocities, targeting both PADAYON leaders and those seeking to acquire land titles through a legal instrument known as the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP).

From January-April 2004 for example, a national campaign network dubbed as Task Force Bondoc Peninsula (TFBP) documented **two (2) cases of robbery, four (4) cases of harassment, and one (1) case of frustrated** in Barangay San Vicente alone, all of which were imputed on the NPA’s southern Quezon unit-the Maria Theresa de Leon Command.

Reported Cases of NPA Killings and Harassments in Bondoc Peninsula

Case	Date	Victim/s	Perpetrators
Murder	4 February 2003	Reymundo “Teteng” Tejino	NPA
Verbal threat	9 August 2003	Felizrdo Benitez	2 NPAs, one of the identified as KaRuben
Verbal threat	10 September 2003	Felizardo Benitez and Efren Binalla	7 NPAs
Verbal threat	12 December 2003	Alberto “Bonggo” Bitong	3 NPAs
Attempted murder	18 January 2004	Dioscoro “Junior” Tejino	NPA

Case	Date	Victim/s	Perpetrators
Robbery	18 January 2004	Juanita Tejino and Danilo Rico	NPA
Five-year old boy made to crawl at gunpoint	18 January 2004	Joshua Tejino	4 NPAs, two of them identified as Ricardo “Ka Ricky” Rodrigo and Ka Irene Reñon
Failed ambush	29 March 2004	Alberto Bitong	10 NPAs
Intimidation	2 April 2004	Deolito Empas	NPA member Bobong Becamon and his two sons
Forcible house entry	3 April 2004	Deolito Empas and Emilio Saraga	NPA

Such actions of the NPA ironically reflects their inability to follow Mao’s own principles who, time and again, stressed the pivotal role of the peasantry in any libertarian endeavor and the need to protect them from any sort of harm. As he himself mentioned:

Without the poor peasants there can be no revolution. To reject them is to reject the revolution. To attack them is to attack the revolution. (15) (emphasis added)

In a sense, **such repudiation of Maoist dictum by the CPP-NPA and its open assault on their supposed mass base was prompted by their dwindling support from the community, due to their repeated failure to enact an actual land transfer from the landowning class to the poor peasantry.** This was so for the exigencies of actual combat required the deferment of genuine land reform until after the seizure of state power and the establishment of a CPP-led government. In the meantime, the peasantry would have to content themselves with the Party’s minimum program of land-rent reduction and usury abolition, for to do otherwise “would attract the attention of the military.” (16)

PADAYON, on the other hand, is supporting efforts to actually dismantle the haciendas in Bondoc Peninsula by utilizing the prevailing legal infrastructure (i.e. CARP) coupled with the actions of the autonomous peasant mass movement. Dubbed as the bibingka strategy, such an approach assumes that the successful implementation of land reform involves the “sympiotic interaction between autonomous societal groups from below and state reformists from above.” (17)

Through this framework, exactly **10,511 hectares of land were placed under the effective control of more than 2,211 farmers in Bondoc Peninsula from 1996 to May 2003.** This overwhelming reform initiative have posed a direct challenge to the landed elite, contesting their hold on the province’s economic resources and the very foundation of their political might.

With such concrete accomplishments, it is no wonder that numerous peasant communities have begun to shift their allegiance from the CPP to PADAYON and its numerous allies, forming their own local organizations and challenging the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) to act on their demands.

It would have been better however if the CPP-NPA opted to defend these new self-sustaining communities, using their armed strength to ensure their existence and prevent any re-encroachment by the landowning elite. But instead, the Communist Party has decided to eliminate these farmer leaders and salvage its faltering power and legitimacy through the “barrel of a gun.”

Conclusion: Now for the Good Part!

But all is not gloom and doom for the Philippine Left. For as a moment in a far larger dialectical process, the current combative posture of the CPP (though truly dangerous and antagonizing) merely reveals a difficult yet momentary phase in its eventual renewal.

In fact, as this piece is being written, the diverse forces and tendencies within the Left are now undergoing thorough reexamination of its past and its present predicament, so it may device a far better trajectory for the future. Except of course for the CPP which-like a doddering septuagenarian-has grown comfortable with its old formulas and aged dogmas, all these progressive forces have embarked upon their ideological exploration with a fair degree of openness and respect, and a willingness to engage in dialogue, discussion and discourse.

While differences however are bound to occur on the finer points of ideological interpretation (given the pluralist dimension of the Philippine Left), we have opted to resolve such variations in the most civilized manner possible, refusing to initiate a war of attrition and a barrage of ugly accusations a la Joseph Goebbels. We have done so, for a pluralist ethic we believe is the true requirement at the present juncture when "the old is dying and the new cannot be born." This is the true wave of the future, and a far better option for the Filipino people. (18)

On other hand, to remain loyal to the CPP is to embrace a discredited past with all its vanguardism and Stalinist methodology, which is better left in the museum of antiquity along with the stone axe and the Tyrannosaurus Rex.

Notes

- (1) Communist Party of the Philippines-International Department. "Links of Counterrevolutionary Groups with Trotskyites and Social Democrats," Ang Bayan, 7 December 2004.
- (2) Gramsci, Antonio. Selection from the Prison Notebooks. International Publishers: New York; 1997, p.168.
- (3) Sison, Jose Maria. "Walden Bello Exposes Himself as Pro-US Pseudo-Progressive." 30 December 2004.
- (4) Simon, Roger. Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction. Lawrence and Wishart: London; 1982, p.49.
- (5) Cited in Simon, op.cit., p.23.
- (6) Gramsci, op.cit., p.161.
- (7) Ibid., p.57.
- (8) Ibid., pp.57-58.
- (9) Sison, Jose Maria with Rainer Werning. The Philippine Revolution: The Leader's View. Crane Russak: New York; 1989, p.172.
- (10) Ibid., p.77.
- (11) Gramsci, op.cit., pp.275-276.

- (12) Congress of Reestablishment, Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). Program for a People's Democratic Revolution. 26 December 1968. http://prwc.netfirms.com/cpp/doc/pdr/pdr_e02.shtml.
- (13) Amado Guerrero is the pseudonym of CPP founding Chairman Jose Maria Sison.
- (14) Guerrero, Amado. Philippine Society and Revolution. International Association of Filipino Patriots (IAFP): Oakland; 1979, p.131
- (15) Mao Tse-tung. "Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan," in Stuart Schram, The Political Thought of Mao Tse-Tung. Praeger Publishers: New York; 1970, p.255.
- (16) Putzel, James. "Managing the 'Main Force': The Communist Party and the Peasantry in the Philippines," in Kasarinlan: A Philippine Quarterly of Third World Studies. Vol. 11, Nos. 3 and 4. 1st and 2nd Quarter 1996. Third World Studies Center-University of the Philippines: Quezon City, p.138.
- (17) Borras, Saturnino Jr. The Bibingka Strategy in Land Reform Implementation: Autonomous Peasant Movements and State Reformists in the Philippines. Institute for Popular Democracy: Quezon City; 1999, p.134.
- (18) Gramsci, op.cit., p.276.