

“We are Siding with Filipino Capitalists”: Nationalism and the Political Maturation of Jose Ma. Sison, 1959-61

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Jose Maria Sison, founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines, developed the foundational ideas of his future political career during his final year as a graduate student at the University of the Philippines in 1961. An examination of his writings and activity over the course of this year reveals that a series of political developments pushed his ideas from those of an existentialist focused on the alienation of the individual to the basic conceptions of Stalinism, which sought to tie mass social anger to the interests of a section of the ruling class in the name of nationalism.

Jose Maria Sison, who in 1969 founded the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), has been one of the most significant political figures in the Philippines over the course of the past fifty-five years. Both his writings and the organizations over which he exercised ideological and political leadership have played an influential and at times decisive role in major historical developments within the country.

This influence has, above all, taken the form of channelling the repetitive explosive energy of mass social anger, driven by the grinding poverty and inequality of life for the broad masses of the Philippine population, through the ideological apparatus of nationalism and constraining it within the political machinery of a section of the ruling elite. The justification for this was the programme of Stalinism, whose fundamental principles—socialism in one country, a two-stage revolution and the bloc of four classes—argued that the tasks of the revolution in the Philippines, as in countries of belated capitalist development throughout the world, were national and democratic in character and not yet socialist, and that a section of the capitalist class, the ‘national bourgeoisie’, was therefore progressive and an ally in the revolutionary struggle. [1] This article examines the origins of Sison’s political ideas and finds that their basic outline was drawn during his final year as a graduate student. I reconstructed Sison’s political evolution using the contemporary written record, giving particular weight to Sison’s own publications, the majority of which appeared in the respected University of the Philippines campus newspaper, the *Philippine Collegian*. This approach distinguishes this article from most prior scholarship on Sison and the CPP, which has largely been based on interviews with Sison and with members and former members of the party. Sison is among the most widely interviewed figures in Philippine history. Multiple biographical and autobiographical books have been published based entirely on extensive interviews with him (e.g., Sison and Werning 1989; Sison and Rosca 2004). While scholarly examinations have often been more critical and have relied on a wide range of interviews with a number of different figures, they nonetheless share a common methodological approach to their subject. This article attempts to demonstrate that reliance on the contemporary written record yields a starkly different narrative from the post hoc accounts provided in interviews, often conducted several decades removed from the events in question.

Throughout Sison's undergraduate and graduate education at the University of the Philippines, the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP), the Stalinist Communist Party of the Philippines, under the leadership of General Secretary Jesus Lava, had disappeared entirely from political life. By the mid-1950s, in the wake of the defeat of the Huk Rebellion, the PKP had effectively liquidated its political organization (Scalice 2017, pp. 93-100). Nationalism, however, was resurgent in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In academic circles it took an initially anti-clerical, liberal form, but in the corridors of political power it was expressed as economic concern for the advancement of native capitalism and national industry. This perspective was most articulately expressed by Senator Claro M. Recto. Its purveyors, however, increasingly recognized that their success required the mobilization of the motive force of broad popular sentiment. Stalinism was a sharp expression of these nationalist conceptions, and its programme enabled it to serve as the interface between the elite desire for an increased share of the national wealth and the driving force of mass social anger. The re-emergence of the PKP in 1962, with Sison now in its central leadership, facilitated these ends. Within six months they had merged the newly formed Lapiang Manggagawa (LM, or Workers' Party) with the government of President Macapagal, whom Sison hailed as carrying out the "unfinished revolution" (*Progressive Review* 1963, p. 2).

Instrumental in this organizational development was the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) and its representative in the Philippines in the early 1960s, Bakri Ilyas, who was a graduate student at the University of the Philippines. Sison's sojourn in Indonesia, facilitated by Bakri, provided organizational form to his emerging political ideas. I argue, however, that Sison's political perspective and class orientation—the critical ideas that shaped his future career—were formed during his 1961 year as a graduate student on the campus of the University of the Philippines, prior to his sojourn in Jakarta in 1962.

Jose Maria Sison

To understand Sison's intellectual development, it is essential to grasp his class roots. He expressed the interests of a layer of the petty bourgeois intelligentsia who in the mid-twentieth century had seen a marked decline in their privileges and were looking to secure new means of shoring them up and expanding them. Jose Maria Sison, commonly referred to as Joma, was born into an affluent landowning family in Cabugao, Ilocos Sur, on 8 February 1939—forty-nine years to the day after Claro M. Recto (Sison and Werning 1989, p. 1). Sison's great-grandfather, Don Leandro Serrano, controlled the largest estate in Northern Luzon during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Sison recounted that Don Leandro owned "eighty percent of my hometown and large chunks of four other municipalities, and under tax declaration most of the shoreline of ten towns from Badoc, Ilocos Norte to Sta. Lucia, Ilocos Sur. His estate produced rice, tobacco, indigo and maguey" (Sison and Werning 1989, p. 3). With the profits from his estate, he built "the largest mansion in the province. With twenty-five rooms, it was said to have a total floor space of 5,000 square meters, excluding a dining hall that could seat hundreds, a chapel, and a four-level storehouse that was the biggest in the province" (Sison 1986, p. 32). Don Gorgonio Sison, who married one of Don Leandro's daughters, was the last *gobernadorcillo* [2] (governor) of Cabugao under the Spanish colonial regime (Sison and Werning 1989, p. 1). He became the municipal president of the town during the brief Philippine Republic (1899-1900), and managed to retain his position under the Americans, becoming Cabugao's mayor (Sison and Werning 1989, p. 1). His title changed three times under three successive governments, but Don Gorgonio's political power, unlike his allegiance, remained constant. Don Gorgonio rapidly integrated the family economic interests into US colonial rule, displaying an exhibit of the economic exports of Cabugao at the 1904 World Fair in St. Louis and winning a gold medal for his efforts. By 1921, the Sison family estate included vast tobacco holdings, worked by an army of tenant farmers, as well as "the seaside barrio of Salomague", which was one of twenty-two sites in the country reserved as a possible base for the US military (Rosca 2004a, p. 6;

RSC 1921).

Joma Sison's family embodied feudal privilege, with its peasant clients and sprawling landholdings—adjoined and divided up again by intermarriage—and on this basis the Sison clan extended their political power. Sison was part of a pervasive nexus of familial connections that stretched from the National Legislature to the Manila Cathedral. Two of his uncles were congressmen. Another was the archbishop of Nueva Segovia, which encompassed all of the province of Ilocos Sur. And his great-uncle was the province's governor. The front pews in Sunday Mass were reserved for Sison's family. The peasant tenants of their estate came each day to his home to "deliver land rent, ask for seeds, do menial tasks around the house or plead for some special consideration" (Sison and Werning 1989, pp. 1, 3).

All of this shaped the psychology of the young Sison. His mother, Florentina, during an interview in 1970, described the child Joma, whom she affectionately called Cheng: "Cheng ordered our maids around—more than any of my other children. Maids had to wait on him constantly. He hardly did things for himself. Even in the bathroom, he would call the servants to hand him his towel, his clothes" (Crisologo 1970, p. 12).

This world, however, was disappearing. The commodities—rice, tobacco, indigo and maguey—that had proved so lucrative for Don Leandro fared poorly in the twentieth century. While sugar, processed in centrifugal mills, became a mono-cropped commodity of immense significance on the world market, the labour-intensive craft manufacture of indigo and maguey died out. The indigo dye was replaced by chemical synthesis and the fabric of the maguey cactus was displaced by far cheaper industrial goods. The majority of rice production shifted to the fertile region of Nueva Ecija (Doeppers 2016, pp. 78–82). Tobacco came to dominate the family holdings, but it could not sustain their former wealth, and with the opening of the post-war period the decline became increasingly marked as the cheaper, sought-after Virginia tobacco began displacing older native strains. [3] The dull thud of an axe could be heard in the cherry orchard.

In early 1949, as Joma turned ten, his father, Salustiano Sison, looking to shore up the family income, wrote to his uncle, Vicente Mallari, asking him to convey to the Secretary of the Interior, Sotero Baluyut:

I have learned from reliable source [sic] that Secretary Sotero Baluyut is employing Secret Agents of the Department of Interior in pursuance of the present campaign against dissidents in Central Luzon and other parts of the Philippines. Inasmuch as I have not known personally the Secretary of the Interior and I know that you are very close to him, I am soliciting said position through your kind intervention, and you can rest assured that I can tackle the job handily, because of my academic qualifications and wide experience in dealing with the peasants. (S. Sison 1949) [4]

The peasant-based Huk rebellion had broken out across central Luzon, and Salustiano Sison was looking to secure employment as a "Secret Agent" overseeing the suppression of the peasantry. [5]

Sison's father was a landlord, and the letter expressed both his need for employment and his class interests. His children, however, as they reached the age of maturity were less feudal and more urban, and of decidedly more limited means. They were, in a word, petty bourgeois. Joma Sison's siblings became a doctor, a dentist and a technocrat in the Marcos administration. Joma himself aspired to "become a lawyer, go to Harvard, and be a political leader" (Sison and Werning 1989, p. 9).

This ambition, it seems, did not grip his imagination until he entered college, for he lacked focus

during his secondary schooling. In 1952, at the age of thirteen, Joma Sison left Cabugao for Manila to enrol at Ateneo High School, but he was expelled in his second year after being absent from class for more than thirty days. Sison later recalled that he had been playing “truant, going to the movies and whiling away my time at the USIS [US Information Service] library”, but had maintained relatively good grades by copying his classmates’ notes (Sison 2006). Such prep school misadventures were not uncommon among the children of the well-to-do, and the recourse was straightforward—Sison transferred to San Juan de Letran, thus moving from an elite all-boys school run by Jesuits to another, run by Dominicans (Sison and Werning 1989, p. 8).

At the beginning of the 1956 school year, Joma Sison enrolled at the University of the Philippines (UP) in the English Department. In a first-year Spanish class, he met Juliet de Lima, a Library Science major who was one of eleven siblings from an influential and devoutly religious family in Iriga, Bicol, and they secretly married before a justice of the peace in September 1959. Sison had intended upon graduation to enrol in law school, but he recounted that “because I now had to earn a living, I had to give up my plan of going to the College of Law” (Sison and Werning 1989, p. 12). In October 1959, one month shy of completing his Bachelor of Arts in English, Sison was appointed as a teaching fellow at the university, where he began teaching freshman classes in English grammar. He embarked on a two-year course of graduate studies, while Juliet de Lima worked as a librarian (Chapman 1987, p. 71). [6]

The newly married graduate student with starkly pared-back personal ambitions seemed an unlikely candidate to play an instrumental role in the political life of the coming decade. Sison’s writings at the beginning of his graduate work reveal that his political thought remained comparatively undeveloped. It was over the course of the next two years at UP that Sison’s political ideas took form.

Sison became the foremost representative of a social layer that found its interests articulated by Senator Claro M. Recto. The early 1960s saw the emergence of immense excitement among college-educated youth for the nationalist writings and speeches of Recto, and Sison came to stand at the centre of efforts to give this energy organizational shape. At first glance the senator seems an odd choice for the enthusiasm that he received: an opponent of women’s suffrage, a leading collaborator in the Japanese occupation and a man most comfortable in Spanish, unable to speak passable Tagalog (Davis 1989, p. 127; Constantino 1971, pp. 2–4; Smith 1976, p. 286). The basis of the support he received, however, was the perspective of economic nationalism and nationalist industrialization that he came to articulate in the latter half of the 1950s. Recto’s speech before the Chamber of Industries in June 1955 was an early and lucid expression of this outlook. The root cause of poverty, he argued, was the fact that the Philippine economy was of an agricultural rather than industrial character, for “an agricultural economy is always an economy of poverty” (Recto 1990a, p. 362), and thus, “nationalism and industrialization are the two faces of the same coin” (Recto 1990a, p. 360). There was a danger, he warned, in failing to industrialize, for “the more disappointed and disillusioned [the people] become the more prone they will be to listen to offers of radical solutions” (Recto 1990a, p. 365). By 1957, these ideas had reached their fullest and sharpest articulation. In a speech before the Cavite Jaycees, Recto called for:

... industrialization of the country by Filipino capitalists, and not simply the prevention of industrialization by foreign capitalists; exploitation of our natural resources by Filipino capital; development and strengthening of Filipino capitalism, not foreign capitalism; increase of the national income, but not allowing it to go mostly for the benefit of non-Filipinos. (Recto 1990b, p. 148)

Recto’s economic nationalism expressed the interests of layers of Filipino capitalists, both industrialists and small businessmen, who sought to secure state intervention to expand their

holdings, through the deployment of subsidies and the implementation of protective measures against foreign rivals (Arcellana 1990, pp. 318–43). The Retail Trade Nationalization Law (1954) and the ‘Filipino First’ policy of the Garcia administration (1957–61) were initial political manifestations of this perspective, transferring segments of the economy from foreign to Filipino ownership. The terms of the Bell Trade Act (1946) and the Laurel-Langley Agreement (1955), however, established parity rights for American business interests in the Philippine economy, and American businesses were thus explicitly exempted from these measures. It was the Chinese business community that bore the brunt of all of the nationalization measures, which threatened not only larger retail firms but small corner stores as well.

The limitations in the implementation of Recto’s nationalist vision were palpable by the beginning of the 1960s, and the layers of students who were drawn to his perspective began to seek to overcome these difficulties by mobilizing a mass movement behind this programme, looking to bring pressure to bear upon the political establishment. Sison would prove to be the most capable and articulate representative of this conception. Generating mass support for Recto’s vision, however, was not an easy task, for this was a quintessentially petty bourgeois enthusiasm: the demand of support for a set of bosses on the basis of their nationality. Recto’s programme was effectively a form of trickle-down economics, arguing that if Filipino capitalists controlled Philippine industry it would improve the Philippine economy, which would, in the end, improve the lives of workers.

Here the programme of Stalinism proved instrumental. In service to the construction of socialism in a single country, the Stalinist bureaucracies in Moscow and Beijing sought to secure trade and diplomatic ties with various capitalist powers by leveraging the political weight of the Communist Parties in each country. In service to this end, the Communist Parties promoted the old Menshevik idea of a two-stage revolution, which claimed that there first needed to be a national-democratic revolution that would be followed at some point in the future by a socialist revolution. Given that the tasks of this first revolution were not yet socialist, but rather national and democratic in character, there would necessarily be a section of the capitalist class that would play a progressive role—the national bourgeoisie. The task of the working class and peasantry in the national democratic revolution was thus to ally with the national bourgeoisie and to support it. This programme aided the bureaucracies in Moscow and Beijing in their quest to establish profitable relations with sections of the ruling elite around the globe.

Sison’s writings, over the course of his two years of graduate study at UP, demonstrate that he arrived at the programme of Stalinism on the basis of seeking to secure a mass constituency for economic nationalism. Stalinism provided him with a political language that made possible the subordination of the struggles of the working class and peasantry to the interests of Filipino capitalists.

Student Cultural Association of the University of the Philippines (SCAUP)

Sison’s political maturation did not begin, however, with economic questions. Throughout his undergraduate and graduate career at UP, the topic of debate that occupied both students and faculty members was the dispute between religious obscurantism and secular anti-clericalism. Clerical authorities in academia, most notably at the Ateneo de Manila University, were bent on suppressing the secular curricula of public schools. This campaign waged by the Catholic Church was intimately bound up with the red-baiting McCarthyism of the House Committee on Anti-Filipino Activities (CAFA). Leading the charge on behalf of the church was Catholic Action (CA), along with its student wing, Student Catholic Action (SCA), whose powerful branch on the UP campus was known as the University of the Philippines Student Catholic Action (UPSCA) (Sison and Sison 2008, p. 44).

In August 1956, 154 professors and 4 administrators on the UP Diliman campus formed the Society for the Advancement of Academic Freedom (SAAF) to oppose the “recrudescence of religious intolerance” on the UP campus (Ordoñez 2008, p. 38). Their primary opponent was Jesuit Fr. John Delaney, who, “acting as parish priest for the UP Diliman community, launched a crusade, with the help of the UPSCA ... to ‘cleanse’ the campus of ‘atheists’ ” (Ordoñez 2008, p. 38). Ricardo Pascual, the logical positivist head of the philosophy department, was a particular target of UPSCA and Delaney. Delaney, wrote Eduardo Lachica, the “eminence gris behind the University of the Philippines Student Catholic Action”, seemed to have “back door access to [University] President Vidal Tan” (Lachica 1971, p. 174). John Delaney died in early 1956 and Vidal Tan stepped down in 1957, lacking support on the board of regents. Not much changed under the one-year stint of acting president Enrique Virata, but with the installation in 1958 of Sison’s uncle, Vicente Sinco, who had been the Dean of the Law School, the tide turned somewhat against UPSCA.

In an attempt to curtail the power of the UPSCA on campus, Sinco altered the charter of the Student Council, limiting each student organization to one representative on the council regardless of the organization’s total membership or the number of votes it received in the campus election. The UPSCA filed an appeal against Sinco’s decision before the Court of Appeals, which issued an injunction against all student elections pending its decision. Sinco responded by abolishing the Student Council and creating a Student Union, which had an identical charter to that of the council’s but with Sinco’s cap on representation written into its founding documents (Garcia 1962, p. 4).

These struggles and the opening up of space for secular humanism fostered an atmosphere of intellectual freedom and debate. Luis Teodoro, a close associate of Joma Sison’s in the early and mid-1960s, described the atmosphere of UP in 1960:

Faculty members and students discussing the latest Camus novel or Sartre manifesto were common sight (and sound—the discussions were often loud enough to wake the dead) at The Basement, as were students and professors going into some arcane issue in Philosophy at Little Quiapo, specially at the “Philosopher’s Inn” of Dr. Ricardo Pascua [sic], who then chaired the Department of Philosophy. (Teodoro 2008, p. 75)

Sison was caught up in the enthusiasm. Francisco Nemenzo Jr., who became a member of the central committee of the PKP in the period leading up to martial law and much later president of the University of the Philippines, was an intimate of Sison’s in the early 1960s and he claimed that Sison was “flirting with existentialism” (Jones 1989, p. 20; Abinales 2001, p. 15). Sison was a member of the three-person editorial board of the *Fugitive Review*, a slight literary magazine that briefly published during Sison’s stint as a graduate student. The first issue, published in October 1959, carried an editorial statement of purpose—“Why the Fugitive Review?” The statement clearly revealed the magazine to be representative of the prevailing intellectual ferment; a hybrid of Pascual’s logical positivism and Sartrean existentialism:

It is often the case that fugitives arise out of necessity.... There are a number of valid causes for this; the most common of which generally springs from a certain lack of sympathy of the society wherein these belligerent souls find themselves inextricably in [sic]. The hostility that the majority (whose attitudes and actuations are often motivated by anything but the reasonable and just) feels for them ... places them in a somewhat uncomfortable predicament. Needless to say, a pervasive sense of beleagueredness grows upon them.

... [This] modest publication will be guided by a simple creed—to allow the channels of thought and feeling the freedom from the obstructive elements in campus.... “The students are alive, and the purpose of education is to stimulate and guide their self-

development”, preaches Alfred North Whitehead.

... The supreme responsibility of the University is to provide an atmosphere conducive to private initiative and action without thus prejudicing itself. It must sow the seeds of dissent, not with a view to disrupt the value framework of society, but to incite the latent genius of the flock. Orthodoxy is the road taken to the grave. (*Fugitive Review* 1959, no. 1, pp. 1-2) [7]

The *Fugitive Review* displayed a healthy humanist impulse combined with a sizable dollop of elitism, a fixation on the individual, and a voluntarist conception of political change. The *Fugitive Review* demonstrates that Sison’s philosophical roots were in Sartrean idealism, with its existential preoccupation with the freedom and choice of the individual. Sison’s early writings displayed a strident moral surety that rested on the self-confidence of the far-sighted individual alienated from society and its great unwashed masses. These were the philosophical roots of the nationalism of Joma Sison and many other of the intellectual leaders of the youth movement that eventually would become part of the CPP.

Under Sison’s leadership, the secular, anti-clerical existentialism prevalent on the Diliman campus took organizational shape. He gathered together a discussion group that met regularly on campus over the course of 1960. In October, the group officially announced its founding as a campus organization with the name Student Cultural Association of the University of the Philippines (SCAUP). [8] Sison recounted that “[i]t was with some humor that we adopted the acronym SCAUP to stress the fact that we were diametrically opposed to the UPSCA as it was then” (Sison and Sison 2008, p. 47). [9] At its founding, SCAUP had around thirty members and Sison served as its chair. [10] While it emerged out of the anti-clerical sentiment that had become prevalent on the UP campus under Vicente Sinco, over the course of the next year SCAUP rapidly moved beyond its roots towards a broader, nationalist perspective. [11] As Eduardo Lachica correctly noted, SCAUP “played a key role in the transition in campus politics from anti-clericalism to nationalism” (Lachica 1971, p. 177).

The dominant intellectual influence in this transition was Recto. It was his sudden death in Rome in October 1960 that seems to have provided the impulse for the organization’s formal founding. SCAUP began making preparations for its first public event, to be held on 8 February 1961, Recto’s birthday, in his honour (*Philippine Collegian* [PC], 1 February 1961, pp. 1-2). The event was slightly delayed, but SCAUP held a two-day seminar on 13-14 February organized around the theme of Cultural Nationalism, to which they invited Mrs Recto. SCAUP founding member Petronilo Daroy delivered a pretentious speech, indicative of the elitist thinking of the organization as a whole, declaring that “Recto is culturally significant in refusing to be identified with the national mediocrity.... [T]he late Senator does not correlate phenomena objectifying our culture, but he is simply a phenomena [sic] of culture. His relevance is as an opposing self of our culture” (PC, 15 February 1961, p. 5). At the beginning of 1961, the members of SCAUP, under the influence of existentialism, saw nationalism as the cause of the enlightened individual who stood above the mediocrity of the mass as an “opposing self”. In his opening remarks to the gathering, Sison announced that SCAUP would hold a Recto seminar every year in February. In the following years, the February Recto seminar would become the defining tradition of the organization. The fledgling student group was thrust briefly into the public limelight a month later by a controversy that erupted before the Committee on Anti-Filipino Activities (CAFA).

Committee on Anti-Filipino Activities (CAFA) and “The Peasant War”

Beyond Sison’s own highly suspect claim that he was drawn to its ideas as early as his third year of high school, we have thus far in his intellectual development no evidence of any encounter with

Marxism. Sison described how he “came across a Marxist study of the peasant war in the Philippines, published in the faculty journal”, which was influential in the development of his ideas (Sison and Werning 1989, p. 11). There is no doubt that Sison did ‘come across’ this work, as it was the subject of national controversy in March 1961 when the Committee on Anti-Filipino Activities, under Leonardo Perez, denounced the article in question as communist and hauled faculty members before the committee to question them regarding its publication.

The article in question, “The Peasant War in the Philippines”, had been written in 1946 and was reprinted in 1958 in the *Philippine Social Sciences and Humanities Review* at the University of the Philippines. No author was listed (“The Peasant War” 1958). While “Peasant War” was clearly influential in the development of Sison’s thinking, this was not because its analysis was Marxist. On the contrary, the paper expressed a reformist and anti-Marxist perspective. In opposition to Lenin’s conception that imperialism was the inevitable highest stage of capitalism, the “Peasant War” saw imperialism as an unfortunate policy choice that could be prevented by the expansion of the New Deal in the United States, an analysis that was in keeping with John Hobson’s 1902 work, *Imperialism*, which had rooted the drive towards imperialism in the perils of underconsumption. The underpaid working class could not afford the commodities they were producing, and thus capitalism needed to forcibly expand into new markets (Hobson 1965). [12] The author of the “Peasant War” wrote:

The trend of American foreign policy—world economic supremacy and political hegemony—is not inevitable. It has been only after the death of the late President Roosevelt that a sweeping change in America’s foreign policy occurred....

Capitalism rests upon the sale of goods at profit. But goods cannot be sold unless the masses have the money to buy. Therefore merely from the standpoint of enlightened selfishness, if nothing else, capitalism should provide employment, high wages and salaries, ample leisure for the masses to consume goods and services, and decent income for the farming population....

President Roosevelt did just this: controlled expansion of production to provide for more employment, controlled prices to bring the goods within the reach of the masses, and increased wages to provide adequate purchasing power. This economy would not depend upon conquest for survival.

Hence, Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms....

But things took a different course on the assumption of office of President Truman. (“The Peasant War” 1958, pp. 401-2)

The “Peasant War” saw the solution to Hobson’s dilemma not in Marxism but in a warmed-over Keynesianism. From this premise flowed the most reformist of conclusions for politics in the Philippines. According to the author, the paramount political issue in the Philippines was the struggle for ‘civil liberties’. US imperialism destroyed the Philippine Revolution of the nineteenth century, set up a puppet Constituent Assembly and then drafted the 1935 Philippine Constitution in keeping with its own interests. From the perspective of the “Peasant War”, however, “the introduction of the American political system constituted a great revolutionary stride” (“The Peasant War” 1958, p. 431). Under the American political system, “where civil liberties, free elections and constitutional rights are said to be guaranteed to the people ... if we examine the position of the masses in relation with legal means, nothing on earth could stop them—the people—from taking control of the reins of government legally. But these legal means ensure the victory of the masses over the reactionary class and the end of the class dictatorship of the elite” (ibid., p. 425). The feudal

elite, therefore, sought to crush democratic rights. The paper concluded, "The peasants may be suppressed, but when they raise their heads again, there shall emerge a new, stronger and more powerful movement which shall all the more strive to conquer, under the regime of true freedom, the political field in which their demands may be realized on a more enduring basis" (ibid., pp. 432-33). The political field celebrated in the article was bourgeois democracy, in which the goal of the future peasant rebellion was the establishment of civil liberties in opposition to the landlords, which would ensure a functioning bourgeois democratic state in which, the author claimed, the interests of the masses would be carried out simply because they were numerically predominant. There was not a smattering of genuine Marxism to this. Sison, however, would find it in consonance with the economic nationalism of Recto and the Stalinist conceptions that he would soon be developing over the course of 1961.

Leonardo Perez, at the head of CAFA, claimed the "Peasant War" was "communistic" (PC, 14 March 1961, p. 3), but this was nothing but a pretext for the harassment of anti-clericalism and academic freedom on the UP campus. The journal in which the article was republished was edited by Leopoldo Yabes and Ricardo Pascual, among others, and Yabes and Pascual were both high-profile targets in the clerical drive against secular education. Using information supplied to him by former US intelligence operative, and now Quezon City Councilor, Carlos Albert, Perez conducted "loyalty investigations", alleging that the UP campus had been "infiltrated by communists". Star witness Josefina Constantino, the secretary of former UP president Vidal Tan, accused Ricardo Pascual of organizing communist cell groups (PC, 14 March 1961, p. 1). [13]

On 14 March 1961, three thousand students marched to Congress to protest against CAFA conducting 'loyalty checks' on faculty members. In a foreshadowing of events of the next decade, "jeepneys outfitted with loudspeakers roamed the campus announcing the rally" (ibid.). A resolution was drawn up and circulated as a leaflet recognizing CAFA's right to conduct the investigation but denouncing the manner in which it was being conducted and calling for the speedy conclusion to the probe. [14] Sison recounted that "SCAUP rose to the challenge of combating the witch hunt. It initiated an alliance of fraternities, sororities, and other campus organizations, which organized the March 14, 1961 anti-CAFA demonstration in defense of academic and intellectual freedom" (Sison and Werning 1989, p. 12). This much is correct; SCAUP did rise to prominence in March 1961, and it did demonstrate in defence of academic freedom. Sison continued, however: "Within the alliance, SCAUP provided an anti-imperialist and antifeudal content to the mass action and all related propaganda. The anti-CAFA demonstration drew 4,000 students and young instructors who went up to the halls of Congress and literally scuttled the CAFA hearings" (Sison and Werning 1989, p. 12). [15] We have evidence of only one piece of propaganda that was produced for the demonstration, and that is the hesitant resolution published on the front page of the 14 March issue of the *Collegian*, politely asking CAFA to speedily conclude its investigation, while affirming its authority to carry it out. There was no "anti-imperialist or anti-feudal content". SCAUP members Heherson Alvarez, who chaired the demonstration, and Reynato Puno told the press that the protest was "not staged against CAFA or the Congress, but against the procedure being followed by the body in conducting the probe" (PC, 22 March 1961, p. 1). Abaya reported that, on the day of the demonstration, "Sectarian [i.e., clerical] infiltrators among the crowd distributed poisoned leaflets naming names and calling for the ouster of 'suspicious' and 'controversial' professors" (Abaya 1984, p. 125).

Joma Sison repeated verbatim the claim that the demonstration "literally scuttled" the CAFA investigation in at least four distinct published accounts (cf., e.g., Sison and Sison 2008, p. 49). In somewhat clearer language, Ninotchka Rosca claimed that Sison "led University students in overrunning the congressional witchhunt of the UP faculty members, scattering the congressmen and bringing the proceedings to a halt" (Rosca 2004b, p. 249). The CAFA investigation, however,

was not even figuratively scuttled, and Damo-Santiago reported that “committee proceedings in room 440 continued” (Damo-Santiago 1972, p. 53). On the day of the protest, Perez announced that “a new hearing would be held on 23 March, with two ‘suspected Reds’ placed on the carpet: Renato Constantino and Agustin Rodolfo” (Abaya 1984, p. 126).

After the one-day protest, the probe continued and widened, targeting IP Soliongco, Hernando Abaya and even SCAUP member Reynato Puno. Former members of the Central Committee of the PKP were brought in for questioning. In April 1961, Perez announced that he would be questioning Celia Pomeroy regarding an alleged ‘student politburo’, and in May, Luis Taruc was brought in to testify regarding zoology professor Agustin Rodolfo’s alleged involvement in the Communist Party. The SAAF published a petition signed by faculty calling for the investigation to stop. The CAFA hearings went on until June 1961, when they ended because Nicanor Jimenez, head of the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA), “told Perez there was no evidence against Soliongco, Abaya and others. Perez had to end his hearings and the story petered out” (Rodrigo 2007, p. 156). [\[16\]](#)

SCAUP, however, did not demonstrate again. After their March rally, they turned their attention to a poetry reading that they held on 4 April, where Sison read a number of his poems (*PC*, 29 March 1961, p. 5). The poetry Sison was writing in the first half of 1961 reflects how little developed his political conceptions were. There was a touch of anti-clericalism and a bit of sexual innuendo, but not much else. Below are two poems published by Sison in early 1961, both of which are representative of the style and content of poetry Sison was publishing at the time. The first was published in February.

Sainted onanists are saving the snails
Turreted on land, their dome’s God’s pate,
Hairless, suncatching but raindrenched,
Rusted hardness whose shiny beginning
In heated end, furious as dug-in windy
Length of body is greasy and snails
Cannot climb and slip into windows
Of goldwalled rooms slimy on marble floor.
Crawl; crawl on ground, on slippery turret
Nowhere is everywhere but somewhere
Where head and touch fall is nowhere
But everywhere. Be content, for,
If restless, hymns shall be sung devoutly
To steal nerves, making them holy.
If restless still, they shall be shredded
By the same hymns and quick shrieking blades.

(Sison 1961a, p. 3)

And the second in April.

There is a deep, deep well that continues
With the high, high tower whose whiteness
Of air is like the whiteness of water there.
The wisdom of light and the silence of dark
Make the wisdom of stalks spying

And swayed together on the sodden crotch.
There is a deep, deep well that continues
With the high, high tower whose whiteness
Of air is like the whiteness of water there.

(Sison 1961c, p. 24)

The phallic and yonic imagery are not exactly subtle, and the authorial wink and nudge feel more than a bit puerile. These occasionally pretentious, sniggering verses are precisely the sort of poetry that the later Sison disavowed. He would rather we remember the “green brown multitude” of his justly more famed 1967 poem, “The Guerrilla is Like a Poet”, than the spilling of seed and word alike in these earlier stanzas (Sison 1967c). [17] Here, Spinoza’s injunction is particularly apt; our task is neither to weep nor to laugh, but to understand. The verses of early 1961 reveal a man as yet in his political infancy. They can serve as a baseline from which to judge the rapid development of his political thinking over the course of the year.

The Developing Idea of Nationalism

Reynato Puno had been called before the CAFA investigation because of an article published in the *Collegian* under his editorship. The article was entitled “Requiem for Lumumba”, a tribute to the Congolese political leader and pan-Africanist assassinated two months earlier, and it ran on 1 March 1961 with the byline “Andres N. Gregorio”. Gregorio was Sison’s first pseudonym. His style was beginning to bear resemblance to the writings of the man who would later found the CPP; it had a tone of overwrought moral agitation straining to find coherent political expression. Sison denounced Americans—not US imperialism, simply Americans—as “double-faced”, using this adjective four times in the space of four sentences (Sison 1961b, p. 3). Sison as yet had no explanation for the role of US imperialism other than a seemingly innate American treacherousness. What is more important is the evidence that the article provides for the influence of PKI member and UP graduate student Bakri Ilyas on the developing political character of Joma Sison’s thinking. Sison wrote:

In Djakarta, the Indonesian students demonstrated against both the American and Belgian embassies.... Indonesia is neutralist and assertive of its nationalism in spite of bombers flying from Clark field or so-called protocol areas of the SEATO. Not one of the two major contending forces in the world has any monopoly over the thinking of its citizenry unlike in the Philippines. Besides this, they have a good memory of the affair where 35,000 progressive Indonesians were massacred by the mercenaries paid from a \$56 million fund handed to Hatta in Bangkok by the Americans ... the shiny Americans were trying to get a foothold on Indonesia and its economic resources. (Sison 1961b, p. 3)

This glossing of the 1948 Madiun Affair and the massacre of a large portion of the Indonesian communist party was based on Aidit’s *Indonesian Society and the Indonesian Revolution* (1958). The only plausible source for Sison’s analysis in “Requiem” was Bakri Ilyas, with whom Sison had begun working in 1961. [18] It is at this point, as he began to work with the PKI, that his academic liberalism began to take the shape of overtly nationalist politics.

That nationalism was coming to predominate over liberalism in Sison’s thinking is evident in an ill-chosen and misogynist metaphor he used in an article in June 1961. Describing the 1919 May Fourth movement in China, Sison wrote,

Coming back to the relationship between nationalism and liberalism, one can clearly see

their fruitful copulation in the May 4th demonstration.... Nationalism maintained an element repellent of imperialism and, [sic] liberalism had an element repellent of the traditionalism of the feudal warlords conniving with the imperialists. But, of course, nationalism—more masculine than liberalism—could take care of itself in the open field of action while also independently liberalism—more feminine—retreated coyly into its academic shell. (Sison 1961d, p. 3)

What is most striking in this article is that while Sison had as yet not a hint of Marxism in his thinking, he had already developed the basic themes that would dominate his political life. He made no reference to the working class—they were not yet part of his vocabulary—but the struggle of nationalism against imperialism and against feudal connivance with imperialism was already present.

An article published in the *Collegian* in late August expressed the further development of Sison's political conceptions:

The Philippine economic and social dilemma is similar to that of these countries [Laos, Cuba, the Congo, South Vietnam and Brazil] recently rocked by revolution... Before we are swept away by overwhelming, [sic] winds generated by unknown factors, we should know and understand them now so that we would not fall into the pits of anarchy—so that we know what to demand as our national rights. It has been to our credit as a people that even if we are driven to more forceful means of change we do not degenerate into wasteful mobs. (Sison 1961g, p. 3)

This article is the first reference in Sison's writings to the working class, whom he referred to as "laborers" (Sison 1961g, p. 3). Sison's concern was to stem the possibility of a revolutionary movement of the masses that was not bound to the goals of nationalism, for such a revolutionary struggle would be "anarchy" and a "wasteful mob" (Sison 1961g, p. 3). He then laid out his basic conception of nationalism and of class relations in Philippine society:

Within the present politico-economic frame, there are three major factors that we have to understand thoroughly: the external or foreign, the semi-external or conniver, and the internal or national.... The external factor refers principally to the big bull operations of the United States which include those of West German and Japanese subsidiaries. This factor is responsible for the dumping of surplus consumption products in our country which prevent our native businessmen from developing a national industry. (Sison 1961g, p. 3)

This external hampering of native businessmen caused the country to "fail to develop industrially" and thus be able to devise "an equitable social program" (Sison 1961g, p. 3). Foreign intervention, according to Sison, was the obstacle to the healthy development of native industrial capitalism that could ensure social welfare. Sison identified the "conniver factor within our shores prancing around with their Federalista complex and with their wasteful luxury" as those "among our fellow nationals ... who collaborate with foreigners in export-import deals" (Sison 1961g, p. 3). [19] Meanwhile, the "internal or national factor remains broken up against itself" and needed to be brought to an "effective national union" (Sison 1961g, p. 3).

Although it is the tenants, the laborers and the unemployed who are most in need of social sympathy and who should motivate and realize mostly any movement for social change because of their overwhelming number and economic deprevation [sic]. It is necessary that all the other national segments—national businessmen, small landowners, government officials, military men, professionals, teachers and students, small

employees and some social outcasts—should be integrated in such a movement. (Sison 1961g, p. 3)

Sison called for workers and peasants to serve as the motive force for a national revolution, carried out in collaboration with the national bourgeoisie and the military, whose only stated goal was national industrialization, which would in turn facilitate unspecified palliative social reforms. Sison concluded, “Only the unity of elements or segments of the internal or national factor will triumph. And it is only through national determination that the whole world can march forward from a condition in which rich countries ride on poor countries just as much as a rich elite rides on the masses within each poor country” (Sison 1961g, p. 3). This conclusion directly contradicted Lenin’s *Imperialism*, in which Lenin argued that imperialism was the highest stage of capitalism and that the only way to end imperialist domination was international socialism, not national determination towards an autonomous national capitalism (Lenin 1964). Sison’s conclusions directly mirrored those of the “Peasant War” article.

We see that by late August 1961, under the influence of Bakri Ilyas, Sison had developed the basic themes of his future political career: the enemies of the people were imperialism (the “external”) and feudalism (the “conniver”), and the working class and the peasantry needed to be yoked with the bourgeoisie, otherwise there would be anarchy. The “connivers” were not distinguished by their class position, but were simply the portion of the nation who chose to collaborate with the “external” to the detriment of the nation. Anyone, from a feudal landlord to a wealthy politician to a major capitalist, could be a welcome part of the nationalist movement, provided they chose not to connive with foreigners. This article expressed, with striking clarity, the essence of the politics of Joma Sison. The first time that Sison wrote on the working class he articulated two ideas. First, he conceived of a revolutionary struggle of the working class in the face of economic and social crisis as a potential “mob” (Sison 1961g, p. 3). And second, he sought the solution to this danger in channelling the working class behind nationalism in an alliance with the bourgeoisie.

During the rainy season of 1961, Sison became involved in a controversy in the English department, where he worked as a lecturer. In his 1989 autobiographical account, Sison stated that,

Subsequent to the anti-CAFA demonstration, I became involved again in the debate between progressive forces and the religio-sectarians. I took the lead with an article objecting to the religio-sectarian bias in the selection of study materials by the UP English department for an academic subject on great ideas of the world required for all undergraduate students. The course syllabus had a preponderance of international authors who garbed their medieval thoughts in modern phraseology. I demanded that Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao and other great Communist thinkers with influence over a large part of humanity should be represented in the syllabus. (Sison and Werning 1989, pp. 12-13)

In truth, Sison wrote two articles on this topic, both of which were published in the *Collegian*. On 19 July, Sison wrote, “The medieval menace more often works insidiously, however. A very recent and very classic example can be cited here. Only last academic year, the lady chairman and vice-chairman of a discipline committee succeeded in fixing the content of a new course according to their holy leanings. These ladies are ardent admirers of Cardinal Newman, Gilson, G.K. Chesterton, Maritain, Dawson and the like. Above all, St. Thomas Aquinas” (Sison 1961e, p. 3). The church, Sison declared, “is the most solid facade and static rallying point of native anti-nationalist elements”. To these religious anti-nationalists, he opposed “the relentless and fearless stand of the late Senator Claro M. Recto” (Sison 1961e, p. 3). In the 16 August 1961 edition of the *Collegian*, Dr Dionisia Rola of the English Department responded to Sison: “I assume that these statements proceed from a given set of facts known to you. Yet you withhold the identity of the Department, of the new course

and of the ladies with 'holy leanings'.... Should not genuine scholarship ... require that where facts are involved such facts be made known?" (p. 3). In the same edition, Sison responded: "To satisfy the demands for the identity of the Department, the new course and the ladies, I give you proper nouns. The Department is that of English; the new course is English IV, which is supposed to deal with 'Great Thoughts'; as to the 'ladies,' I wonder if you don't consider yourself as one." Sison admitted that the curriculum did include "writers like Whitehead, Darwin, Huxley, Russell and H.G. Wells", but was nonetheless skewed towards medieval thinkers. He stated that "this disproportionality is to be bewailed". He said that it was "saddening" that "more competent thinkers ... like Eddington, Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Oppenheimer, Schweitzer, John Dewey, Marx and other better possibles" were not included (Sison 1961f, p. 3). Sison raised no "demands", and never even mentioned "Engels, Lenin, Mao and other Communist thinkers" (Sison and Werning 1989, pp. 12-13). The liberal Sison retreated coyly into his academic shell. [20]

At the beginning of the 1961-62 school year, SCAUP initiated a move to gain editorial control of the *Collegian*. Retaining this control would be a leading preoccupation of the youth organizations around Joma Sison for the next decade. Hernando Abaya, secretary to UP president Vicente Sinco, was made faculty editor of the campus paper (*PC*, 29 August 1961, p. 8). Abaya was intimately connected with the PKP and had been a subject of the CAFA inquiries earlier in the year (Abaya 1984, pp. 119, 124). Under his editorial watch, four candidates were selected to edit the *Collegian*, all of them SCAUP members: Joma Sison, Petronilo Daroy, Luis Teodoro and Ferdinand Tinio. The influential UP school paper was, from top to bottom, run by SCAUP; the organization began to hold its meetings in the *Collegian* office. [21] SCAUP, with Sison at its head, had over the course of 1961 begun developing its ideology—nationalism—away from the cause of the existentialist "opposing self" and towards the need for a mass movement. A collection of Sison's poems, entitled *Brothers*, was published in November, and Petronilo Daroy penned the introduction, entitled "Causes without Rebels", which initially appeared in the *Collegian* in September. Daroy wrote,

To speak of the ideal of national identity is to deal with the getting involved in the issue of problem of [sic] autonomy: it means freedom. And when the Filipino writer starts to deal with the issue of freedom, he inevitably situates himself in history, in, as it were, the maincurrents of national traditions. And the moment he starts to be conscious of this role the literature he creates comes in close correspondence with revolutionary politics. (*PC*, 19 September 1961, p. 4)

The cause being articulated was clear—it was nationalism. But nationalism was no longer simply an intellectual activity; it entailed "revolutionary politics". This cause, however, needed rebels. Sison and company were beginning to look for a nationalist political movement that they could lead.

Indonesia and the Executive Committee of the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP)

The development of this quest for a constituency was conditioned by the expiration of Sison's teaching appointment. In October 1961, Sison's appointment as an ICA-NEC-funded fellow at the University of the Philippines lapsed, a fact Sison later attributed to political motives on the part of unspecified actors (Sison and Werning 1989, p. 15). Within a month, Sison had been granted a scholarship from the Indonesian Jajasan Siswa Lokantara to "study Indonesian language and literature in Djakarta" (Sison and Werning 1989, p. 15). According to the government intelligence file prepared on Sison in 1964, Sison was invited to Indonesia by the Association of Indonesian Students. "In November 1961, a representative from the Association of Indonesian Students, finalized a working agreement with the Student Cultural Association of the University of the Philippines (SCAUP), thru its president Sison, on the exchange of students between the two organizations" ("PKP's 5 Year Project" 1964). This was the Himpunan Mahasiswa Indonesia (HMI), which, along with the Himpunan Sarjana Indonesia (HSI) (Indonesian Scholars Association) of which

Bakri was a member, was closely tied to the PKI (Adam 2005, p. 268; Guillermo 2018, p. 17).

As he prepared to travel, Sison learned that the National Intelligence Coordinating Agency (NICA) had blacklisted him as a subversive and blocked his passport (Sison and Werning 1989, p. 15). Sison appealed to his uncle, Sixto Brillantes, the former governor of Ilocos Sur and now chairman of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC). This was during the thick of the counting of votes from the controversial and fiercely contested 1961 presidential election, but Brillantes found the time to request that President Garcia order the Department of Foreign Affairs to issue Sison a passport (Sison and Rosca 2004, p. 40).

In January 1962, Sison departed for Indonesia (Sison and Werning 1989, p. 202). According to Sison, on his arrival in Jakarta, “[Bakri] introduced me to leaders of the student, youth and other mass organizations” (Sison and Sison 2003). Bakri thus arranged the funding for Sison’s travel and then accompanied him to Jakarta, where he introduced him to the leadership of the PKI.

Sison remained in Indonesia for six months, returning to the Philippines in June. Sison claimed that over the course of his stay he became fluent in Indonesian, read an enormous amount of the “Marxist-Leninist classics” and developed good relations with the PKI (Sison and Werning 1989, pp. 15-16). Sison wrote of his time in Indonesia,

I attended study sessions of the higher Party school of the PKI, the Aliarcham Academy of Social Sciences. [22] I had conversations with the highest PKI leaders, especially Aidit and Njoto. I was hosted by the major Indonesian mass organizations and observed mass work among the youth, workers and peasants. From Indonesia, I forwarded Marxist-Leninist books to comrades in SCAUP, the *Philippine Collegian* and the Lapiang Manggagawa [Workers Party] (especially the National Association of Trade Unions). (quoted in Scalice 2017, p. 107)

The Lapiang Manggagawa (LM) was not formally launched until February 1963, but Sison was in active correspondence with the man directly responsible for organizing it, Ignacio Lacsina, the head of the National Association of Trade Unions (NATU), who, unbeknownst to Sison, was also an active informant for the CIA (Scalice 2017 pp. 124-36). According to Ninotchka Rosca, on his return to the Philippines, Sison’s papers and books were seized “by Intelligence” at the airport, including his master’s thesis on Nick Joaquin. Sison never completed his master’s degree (Rosca 2004a, p. 13). [23] Lacsina, however, provided Sison with a job with NATU, where he was given the title of officer-in-charge of research and education, and received a stipend from the union for his work.

In December 1962, at the instigation of Bakri Ilyas, the PKP gathered forces. Bakri brought together Vicente Lava, an executive for the US multinational Colgate-Palmolive, and Joma Sison. Vicente brought with him Francisco Lava Jr., a deputy clerk in the Court of Appeals, while Sison brought Ignacio Lacsina. They were later joined by a fifth member, when Francisco Lava brought in a close friend, the circulation manager of a major daily newspaper, the “son of a man who had been active in the Democratic Alliance” (Sison and Werning 1989, p. 44). [24] This would have been Ching Maramag, circulation manager of the *Manila Times* and later a member of the Central Committee of the PKP (Fuller 2011, pp. 12-13; Sison 2013, p. 173). Jesus Lava, in hiding, authorized the five of them to form an executive committee to lead the PKP. And thus, while Jesus Lava retained his title of general secretary, the day-to-day decisions of the party were entirely out of his hands.

The role that Sison played in the Executive Committee of the PKP, and the relations that he facilitated between a growing mass movement and alternating sections of the ruling elite, highlight that his work as a leading member of the Communist Party grew out of and was in continuity with the political perspective he had evolved over the course of his two years as a graduate student.

President Diosdado Macapagal, whom the US National Security Council in the lead-up to the 1961 election had characterized in a confidential memo as “pro-American to the point where it is the source of some embarrassment to us” (Johnson 1994), had had a temporary falling-out with Washington. US businessman Harry Stonehill’s purchase of the 1961 presidential election on his behalf had set in motion a string of events that soured Macapagal’s relations with the Kennedy administration (Scalice 2017, pp. 136–58). Posturing briefly in opposition to US interests, Macapagal adopted Sukarno’s language of the “unfinished revolution” (*Progressive Review* 1963, p. 2), moved the Philippines’ Independence Day from 4 July to 12 June, and sought an alliance with Jakarta against the formation of Malaysia.

The PKI, tightening around Sukarno, saw in the confluence of these factors—the rift between Malacañang and Washington, and the mounting tensions over the formation of Malaysia—the opportunity for the Communist Party of the Philippines to re-emerge, insinuating itself into the upper layers of Philippine politics. Sukarno visited Manila in November 1962 and met with Macapagal, and the CIA wrote that during this meeting “opposition to Malaysia brought the Philippines into a close working relationship with Indonesia” (Office of Current Intelligence 1963, p. 3).

The newly formed Executive Committee took up the task of pressuring Macapagal to support Sukarno against Malaysia. The political focus of this alliance would be the creation of Maphilindo, which the PKP saw as a vehicle to further the unity between Sukarno and Macapagal. Within six months, the PKP leadership merged the newly formed, and still independent, workers’ party, Lapiang Manggagawa, with Macapagal’s Liberal Party on the day he successfully concluded the Manila Summit in August 1963 with Sukarno and Tunku Abdul Rahman. [25] Sison wrote the pamphlet, published by the Macapagal government—of which the LM was now formally a part—promoting Macapagal’s land reform. Macapagal’s land reform programme had been quietly drawn up by Wolf Ladejinsky, the personal adviser to Ngo Dinh Diem and member of the Ford Foundation. Sison’s pamphlet, peddling the reform, was dedicated “To President Macapagal, For his relentless struggle to emancipate the Filipino peasant” (LM 1963; Scalice 2017, pp. 184–87).

By 1964, however, Macapagal had re-established open and sycophantic ties with Washington, pushing to send Filipino troops to Vietnam. He turned on Sukarno, raising the spectre of war with Indonesia, and deported Bakri Ilyas as a “spy” of the PKI on 10 May 1965 (Scalice 2017, p. 253). Sison, now at the head of the newly established youth organization, Kabataang Makabayan (KM), broke with Macapagal in 1965 and actively campaigned for the election of Ferdinand Marcos and the Nacionalista Party (NP), which he hailed as “the only party ... which has so far most associated itself with and enlisted anti-imperialists and anti-imperialist groups at certain times.... [P]atriotic businessmen, especially the entrepreneurial group, have relied heavily on it” (Sison 1967a, p. 51). [26] The orientation of the KM to the ‘national bourgeoisie’ was central to its founding documents, including its programme, which made no mention of any demand—e.g., a minimum wage hike or safe working conditions—to improve the lives of workers, but which insisted that the state should be responsible for the “protection of Filipino industrialists and traders” (Kabataang Makabayan 1965, p. 14). On 25 January 1965, Joma Sison addressed a mass demonstration of students, workers and peasants organized by the KM that had gathered in front of the US embassy to denounce the fact that a number of Filipinos had been killed with impunity on the US military bases. He told the rally, “Our strength lies in being able to cooperate with other patriotic national organizations and on the conditions obtaining now in the country particularly those propelled by decontrol and attempts of big American corporations to run down Filipino capitalists. We are siding with Filipino capitalists” (*Manila Bulletin*, 29 January 1965, p. 12).

Sison’s class orientation, which became his lifelong political focus, to develop national industry and indigenous capitalism by securing for it the support of the working masses, had already come into

existence prior to his sojourn in Indonesia in 1962. His education under the PKI and his conscious adoption of the programme of Stalinism supplied this orientation with the political vocabulary of revolution and the usurped historical mantle of October 1917. Prior to his stay in Jakarta, Sison's arguments amounted to a form of trickle-down economics: the benefits of native-owned industry would percolate throughout society and improve the lives of workers. Upon his return he could speak fluently of revolution, of Marxism, while claiming it was a programmatic necessity to complete the national democratic revolution prior to any struggle for socialism, and that it was thus necessary to ally with a section of the capitalist class. His fundamental orientation had not changed, but it now wore the garb of Stalinism.

Maoism is a tactical variant of Stalinism. In 1966–67, Sison and a handful of co-thinkers came into conflict with a majority of the leadership of the PKP and were expelled from the party. They established a new party, the CPP, in 1969, founded on 'Mao Zedong Thought', an expression of the political conceptions coming out of Beijing between 1964 and 1971, the period associated with the emergence of 'Maoism' as a global phenomenon. This period opened with Lin Biao's public articulation of the programme of protracted people's war, witnessed the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, and concluded when Mao put a bloody end to the Red Guard, removed Lin Biao and opened political ties with Washington. Even in this period, in its most recognizable and globally exported form—the Little Red Book and 'surrounding the city from the countryside'—the political programme of Maoist parties remained Stalinist: socialism in one country, a two-stage revolution, and the need to establish an alliance with the 'progressive' section of the 'national bourgeoisie'. The radical rhetoric of Maoism aided Sison and the CPP in securing the support of the masses in a period of social upheaval, but they mobilized the weight of this support behind the interests of their ruling class allies. It was precisely in this manner that the front organizations of the CPP campaigned for the Liberal Party (LP) in 1971, simultaneously touting the virtues of the elite LP senatorial slate and the alleged military victories of the New People's Army (Scalice 2017, pp. 673–91; Scalice 2021).

Stalinism served as the interface between shifts in mass social sentiment on the one hand and the factional disputes between rival sections of the elite on the other. It is this social function that gives Stalinism a particular historiographical significance, as it can function for the historian as something of a social barometer. Careful attention to its shifting political line, reconstructed through the contemporary documentary record, can reveal the subterranean movement of social forces, the rumblings of discontent in the working class and peasantry, and the backroom machinations of the elite.

The vicissitudes of Sison's politics and the shifting alliances formed by the organizations he headed were expressions of his Stalinist quest to find and ally with his sought-after progressive section of the capitalist class in service to the interests of nationalism. The precise identity of this progressive section could shift from year to year and election to election, allowing the party and its front organizations to trumpet support for the Liberal Party in 1971 or Duterte in 2016. [27] At no stage in his long and influential political career, however, has Sison abandoned this fundamental orientation, which he first developed as a graduate student at the University of the Philippines in 1961.

Joseph Scalice is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the School of Humanities, Nanyang Technological University, 48 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639818; email: jscalice@berkeley.edu.

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Footnotes

- [1] The manner in which the CPP and its front organizations embraced Duterte and his murderous war on drugs as 'progressive' in 2016 and subsequently denounced him as a 'fascist' and began organizing with his opponents is a recent and particularly stark manifestation of this orientation.
- [2] The *gobernadorcillo* exercised political, economic and judicial authority over the town.
- [3] Over time this decline became precipitous as the economic basis of the family's wealth eroded from under their estate. The Ramon Sison collection houses over a hundred pages of notes taken by overseers on the family's estate in 1992. There is a scant, grasping character to the tally on each page: nine kerosene cans of rice collected here, seven ganta of mung beans there. The total family holdings had been reduced to twenty-two hectares and over seventy per cent of their tenants worked less than a third of a hectare (RSC, "Farms, Tenants, and Crops").
- [4] Salustiano listed then president Elpidio Quirino as his character reference.
- [5] Kerkvliet characterizes Baluyut as the "arch-enemy" of the Pampanga peasantry (Kerkvliet 1977, p. 46). The founder of the strike-breaking peasant organization Cawal ning Capayapaan (Knights of Peace), now installed as the head of the Department of Interior, Baluyut oversaw the Philippine Constabulary and was directly responsible for carrying out Quirino's brutal crushing of the Huk uprising. Doubtless Salustiano Sison had "experience in dealing with the peasants" (S. Sison 1949). The Ramon Sison collection houses an example: a detailed account of how a member of the Serrano family sent the Cabugao police chief to the home of a local peasant after one of her cattle was found dead near his hut. The police beat the man badly. Joma's uncle defended the police chief against criminal charges and his sentence was reduced to a fine, which was promptly paid (El Juzgado de Primera Instancia de Ilocos Sur 1940).
- [6] Joma Sison's graduate studies were funded by the US government through an ICA-NEC teaching fellowship (Sison and Werning 1989, p. 201). The International Cooperation Agency (ICA) was the direct predecessor of the Agency for International Development (AID), and in 1960 it committed \$285,000 in funds for the University of the Philippines, a small portion of which was allotted to Sison (Owens 1959, p. 2).
- [7] Sison wrote a brief article in the same issue in which he cited the literary influences of Sartre and Andre Malraux (Sison 1959, pp. 12-13).
- [8] The fact that the discussion group formed almost a year prior to the founding of SCAUP has led to some confusion with dates in published accounts, including Sison's own. Weekley claims the group was founded in 1959 (Weekley 2001, p. 20). The timeline in Sison's own book states that SCAUP was organized in October 1959 (Sison and Werning 1989, p. 202). Contemporary newspaper accounts clearly reveal that it was founded in October 1960.

[9] Sison wrote “as it was then” because, in just over a decade’s time, the front organizations of the CPP would enter into a close alliance with UPSCA.

[10] Among the founding members were Satur Ocampo, Perfecto Tera, Luis Teodoro, Vivencio Jose, Ferdinand Tinio, Jaime C. Laya, Petronilo Daroy and Reynato Puno (Weekley 2001, p. 20; Chapman 1987, p. 71). Puno’s legal career would take him from the Court of Appeals under Marcos to Chief Justice of the Supreme Court under Arroyo. Laya would become Marcos’s Budget Minister and then Governor of the Central Bank. Ocampo would become a leading member of the CPP in the 1970s. Joel Rocamora was made treasurer of SCAUP.

[11] When Sison claimed that “SCAUP propagated the general line of national democratic revolution; provided cover for discreet Marxist study; attracted students capable of leading other student organizations and/or taking the editorship of student publications” (Sison and Werning 1989, pp. 11-12), this was only true of the organization in the late 1960s, when it had come to serve the purpose of recruiting students to the national democratic movement who were frightened by the more strident politics of the Kabataang Makabayan. In 1960-61, however, the organization served no such covert purpose. It was a discussion group moving toward nationalist politics.

[12] Lenin rooted the analysis of his 1916 work on many of the findings of Hobson, but combined this with evidence supplied by Rudolf Hilferding and others, correcting Hobson’s focus on the underconsumption of goods as the driving force behind imperialism, and arguing instead that imperialism was rooted in monopoly capitalism, particularly finance capital, and its drive to export capital globally in pursuit of exploitable labour (Lenin 1964, pp. 182-304). On the intellectual and political roots of Lenin’s *Imperialism*, see Day and Gaido (2012).

[13] On the role of J. Constantino, see Abaya (1984 p. 120).

[14] Joel Rocamora carried the permit for the rally (*PC*, 14 March 1961, p. 1; *PC*, 21 March 1961, p. 1). Joma Sison and Petronilo Daroy arranged a contract with the JD bus company to ferry students to Congress. The organizing students held a press conference in the evening at the National Press Club, where, among several others, Joel Rocamora presented the position of the protesting students (Sison and Sison 2008, p. 49). The publication of the UP College of Arts and Sciences, *Sinag*, later claimed that these “buses remained unpaid for months until they threatened to file suit against the student government” (“The University of the Philippines and the Unfinished Revolution” 1972).

[15] The highest contemporary estimate for student participation was 3,000 in the *Philippine Collegian*, not 4,000, as Sison claimed. When Sison repeated the story in 2004, he declared that 5,000 students turned out (Sison and Rosca 2004, p. 40).

[16] While the Perez investigation left the public eye, it did in fact persist, and the US Embassy reported that the investigation was transferred from the CAFA to the Office of the Assistant Fiscal in Quezon City at the instigation of Carlos Albert (CUS DPR 1961, p. 2).

[17] On his website and in his publications, Sison claims that he wrote his most famous poem, “The Guerrilla is Like a Poet”, in 1968, the year in which the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines records its founding. But while the party was actually founded in 1969, Sison’s poem was first published in the *Philippine Collegian* on 8 March 1967, immediately beneath a verse by future senator Miriam Defensor.

[18] The Madiun Affair was a short-lived Communist uprising that was brutally suppressed by the Sukarno government in 1948. A key political component of *Indonesian Society and Indonesian Revolution* was the attempt of D.N. Aidit, head of the PKI, to shift the blame for the Madiun massacre, including the execution of Tan Malaka, away from Sukarno and on to his vice president Mohammad Hatta. It was this political line that Sison was repeating in his article on Lumumba. For an analysis of the significance of Aidit's work, see McVey (1979). Aidit modeled his work after Mao's writings, and in turn provided a model that Sison would later emulate in his *Philippine Society and Revolution* (Guerrero 1971). That Sison drew his political line from Mao and Aidit, here and elsewhere, does not mean that he plagiarized their writings, as argued by Magno (2007). Such a claim is, to be frank, absurd. See Guillermo's detailed examination of this point (2018, pp. 22-32).

[19] The Partido Federal was formed in 1900 by the first layers of the elite to embrace American colonial rule and it advocated for a policy of limited autonomy under US sovereignty and against any idea of independence.

[20] The sexist denunciation of female faculty members at UP for their alleged reactionary ideas continued for years in the organizations that followed Sison's leadership. In 1971, for example, the Kabataang Makabayan attacked Prof. Damiana Eugenio as part of the "Spinster Mafia" who had "kept their maidenhead" for Cardinal Newman (Scalice 2017, p. 575).

[21] Tinio was selected as editor, Joel Rocamora was made associate editor, Luis Teodoro edited the features page, Joma Sison was research editor, and Daroy and Perfecto Tera edited the literary page (PC, 22 August 1961, p. 7).

[22] On Aliarcham Academy, "the PKI's senior cadre training center", see McVey (1990, pp. 22ff).

[23] In addition to his political work, and an incomplete master's degree, Sison also spent a portion of 1961 and 1962 writing a novel. Petronilo Daroy claimed to have read the manuscript (Daroy 1984, p. 35; Abinales 2001, p. 18).

[24] The Democratic Alliance was a political party that brought the support of the PKP and its front organizations behind the candidacy of Sergio Osmeña and the Nacionalista Party in the 1946 elections.

[25] It is in this context that Sison and Bakri organized the Philippine-Indonesian Friendship and Cultural Association (PIFCA) (Sison and Sison 2003). The organization received government funding from both Manila and Jakarta and its leading members had ties to the state. Sison served as general secretary of the organization. A considerable amount of funding went with the organization, and in 1963, for example, Sison arranged for the Philippine-Indonesian Friendship and Cultural Association to sponsor a group of seventy-five dancers and musicians from Indonesia to visit Manila and stage performances there (*Manila Chronicle*, 4 November 1963, p. 7; *Progressive Review* 1963, p. 71; Sison 1967b, p. 5).

[26] This praise for the Nacionalista Party (NP) of Ferdinand Marcos was published in the 1967 *Struggle for National Democracy*. By the early 1970s, Sison had broken with the NP and established a new alliance with the Liberal Party and Ninoy Aquino, and he thus removed this paragraph from the 1972 edition (Sison 1972).

[27] For an example of the political outworkings of one of these alliances, see Scalice (2018).