

Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino: Dogmatism not empiricism is the CPP's basic error

Sunday 7 January 2024, by [PMP](#) (Date first published: 7 January 2024).

On its 55th anniversary statement: [1], the CPP is calling on its ranks to rectify the error of empiricism which it says is at the root of the serious setbacks that the armed struggle and the revolutionary movement has suffered. The anniversary statement listed numerous organizational and political mistakes and weaknesses which it all subsumes as mere aspects of the error of empiricism.

Contents

- [Semi-feudal alibi for protract](#)
- [Protracted war as vulgarizatio](#)
- [National democracy as mass](#)

But a dialectical and materialist analysis that seeks to uncover the truth behind a phenomenon has to be thoroughgoing and all-sided. In the CPP's case, it cannot dismiss dogmatism and instead blame only empiricism. Such is one-sided and therefore flawed.

By insisting on empiricism, the CPP is putting the burden of the problem on the consciousness of its subjective forces. But why not ask the other possibility: does the CPP's dogma still match the objective conditions?

The CPP dismisses any critical review of its basic principles and offhand refuses dogmatism as the root causes of the setbacks it admits. It assumed beforehand that the dogma is correct and thus the only error can be empiricism—the incorrect application of its principles due to a lack of understanding of its theory of the Philippine revolution.

The CPP has put the cart before horse. It has already made a conclusion even before it made a dialectical and materialist analysis of the problem.

In being mechanical and idealist in its analysis, the CPP is sidestepping a serious and comprehensive summing up of its revolutionary experience that may lead to questions about the validity of its “basic principles”—meaning, its semi-feudal analysis of Philippines society, the primacy of armed struggle and national democracy as the political line.

Any honest appraisal of the 55-year history of the CPP and the revolutionary movement it leads—of its peak during the Marcos dictatorship and ironically its secular decline after the transition to trapo democracy—cannot circumvent the challenge of subjecting its basic principles to criticism.

On the one hand, after 55 years of armed struggle, the strategy of protracted war remains at the strategic defensive, and arguably at the early substage characterized by small-scale ambushes. It is

nowhere near advancing to the strategic stalemate, more so strategic offensive. Since the transition in 1986, the armed strength of the NPA has steadily declined—not because of the error of empiricism—but because the armed struggle has gradually lost its erstwhile popular support as a result of the changed political conditions from dictatorship to bourgeois democracy. The dogmatic clinging to the primacy of the armed struggle despite transformation in the political terrain has definitely led to a historic setback.

On the other hand, what has sustained the revolutionary movement led by the CPP in recent years has been its inroads into parliamentary struggle since 2001 that has led to breakthroughs in organizing, mobilizing, education and propaganda among other things. However, this pragmatic shift has been without the benefit of any theoretical clarity nor innovation in its “basic principles.” From boycotting elections, the CPP made a sudden 180-turn to parliamentary struggle—which it has always denounced as fostering reformist illusions among the masses. Its pragmatic adaptation was a response to the positive experience of new radical parties which from 1998 to 2001 proved in practice that parliamentary struggle led to revolutionary gains. These parties came out of the historic Reaffirm-Reject split in the CPP in the early 90’s, and whose theory and practice were encumbered by dogma of Joma Sison.

The disconnect between the CPP’s dogma and its practice is transparent. Refusing to let go of its dogma has led to decline. Yet adaptations in practice to new conditions has made it survive. Still the CPP insists that its dogma is unassailable and the only error can be its incorrect application. It is as clear as day that this is mechanical not dialectical, idealist not materialist.

If the CPP is to truly rectify its errors then it must begin with a critical assessment of its “basic principles.” Does its revolutionary theory reflect the objective conditions?

Is Philippine society semi-feudal? Is protracted war the correct strategy? Is national democracy the right political line?

Revolutionaries who wishes to change Philippine society should come to grips with these questions and weight the arguments for and against these ideas.

The sharpest critique of the CPP’s basic principles was put forward by Popoy Lagman—in three documents called counter-theses—during the split in the 1990’s. If the CPP’s basic principles are indeed valid then it must be proven in crucible of theoretical debate with Popoy Lagman’s ideas as well as with its correspondence to the actual conditions of Philippine society.

Let us examine then Popoy Lagman’s critique of the CPP’s basic principles.

-

Semi-feudal alibi for protracted war

Citing Philippine Society and Revolution (PSR), Popoy clarifies that what Joma actually means is that feudalism is the mode of production of Philippine society.

Sison’s “semifeudalism” is not a mode of production but a mode of description of what is basically to him is a feudal system of economy maintained and preserved through an interactive and symbiotic relationship with imperialism. Even his concept of “semicolonialism” is nothing but a pseudonym of what is virtually a colonial status of the Philippines, because, in Sison’s view of imperialism, it is

really an omnipotent superpower that puts everything under its will.

Popoy then compares and contrasts Joma's explanation of what constitutes feudalism with Marx and Lenin's characterization.

Sison failed to mention any of the four basic features and foundations of feudalism as a mode of production because they no longer exist and have already been undermined in Philippine reality. Sison arbitrarily defines feudalism the way he wants it, minus its essential character as an independent, historical mode of production.

(1) Natural economy, the self-contained and the self-sufficient character of the feudal estate, has been eroded, dissolved and replaced by commodity economy. (2) An economy that required "the direct producer be allotted the means of production in general, and land in particular," no longer prevails. (3) A system of economy that requires "the personal dependence of the peasant on the landlord" so the latter can appropriate the surplus product of the former through "non-economic means" no longer predominates. (4) Feudal bondage, in the true and original sense of the word—the peasant as being tied to the land, is not a reality in our countryside.

*Commodity production, cash and market economy, has conquered the entire countryside, even the most remote villages. The overwhelming majority of the toiling people in the countryside have been dispossessed of the land and the means of production. The landlord is not obliged to provide land to the peasant to till. Feudal bondage, **in the true sense of the word**—the peasant as being tied to the soil—no longer exist. The peasant, if he wants, is free to leave the land that he tills and to venture to other means of livelihood. The overwhelming majority of the tillers have been transformed into "free agents," into proletarians and semiproletarians in the open market of a commodity economy.*

*Even present-day "tenancy" is no longer "**feudal bondage in the true sense of the word**". The peasant as being tied to the soil, his personal dependence on the landlord, his lack of personal freedom, the landlord's direct power over the person of the peasant—no longer prevails. The peasant's surplus product is no longer appropriated by means "other than economic pressure" but precisely through economic pressure—his uprootment from the means of subsistence, his economic dependence on the landlord who controls the means of productions. Personal dependence on the landlord on the basis of natural economy has been replaced by economic dependence on the landlord, "the renting of land because of dire need" on the basis of commodity production.*

The main foundations of feudalism as a mode of production have been substantially undermined in the Philippines in its socio-economic evolution. Yet, Sison insists that feudalism as an economic system persists and predominate in Philippine society because he has reduced feudalism as a mode of production into "landlordism" and "tenancy."

Popoy insists that semifeudalism can be understood as the **survival of feudal** forms of exploitation within a **capitalism mode of production** that animates Philippine society.

But this is not feudalism—as an independent, historical mode of production—but the survivals, the vestiges, the remnants of its forms, i.e., landlordism, tenancy, etc., under present-day society. And no matter how rampant, how prevalent, how pervasive are these feudal forms, they are nevertheless but the survivals of feudalism, not the feudal mode of production itself.

The mode of describing this persistence and pervasiveness of old feudal forms under present-day Philippine society which is essentially bourgeois and capitalistic in character, and in the context of present-day world capitalist system dominated by imperialism, is what should properly be called

“semifeudalism.”

Popoy rebuts as lacking an understanding of Marxism that very common argument by CPP activists that the presence of a small minority of factory workers prove the absence of a capitalist mode of production.

*The argument runs like this: “**The share of the industrial proletariat in the population is very small, while the great majority are peasants, so how can the prevailing mode of production in the Philippines be considered capitalist? How can this be capitalism when it is very slow in increasing the number of factory workers, its number very low in proportion to the entire population?**”*

*In 1894, the factory workers in Russia were only about 1% of the entire population. Yet Lenin declared the “**indisputable domination and development of capitalism in all branches of national labor**” in Russia! But here in the Philippines, what Sison considers the Filipino industrial proletariat include, in 1968, about 15% of the total manpower in the country or 1.8-2 million out of a population of 37 million.*

Even in England and Wales in 1861, according to Lenin (based on Marx’s figures in Capital), there were only 1.6 million employed in the main branches of factory industry, a mere 8% of a population of 20 million. And there were 1.2 million servants—representing a dead loss of “national labor”—whose number was growing more rapidly than the number of factory workers! Yet this country was the most advanced capitalist country at that time!!

*Lenin criticizes those who reduce the working class to factory workers. “**This is repeating (and even aggravating),**” according to Lenin, “**the error of the Russian petty-bourgeois economists who make large-scale machine industry the very beginning of capitalism. Are not the millions of Russian handicraftsmen who work for merchants, with the latter’s material and for ordinary wages, engaged in capitalist production? Do the regular farm laborers and day laborers in agriculture not receive wages from their employers, and do they not surrender surplus-value to them? Are not the workers in the building industry (which has rapidly developed in our country since the Reform) subjected to capitalist exploitation? And so on.**”*

*The point is, according to Lenin: “**Why judge the ‘mission of capitalism’ by the number of factory workers, when the ‘mission’ is fulfilled by the development of capitalism and the socialization of labor in general, by the development of a proletariat in general, in relation to which the factory workers play the role only of front-rankers, the vanguard. There is of course, no doubt that the revolutionary movement of the proletariat depends on the number of these workers, on their concentration, on the degree of their development, etc.; but all these does not give us the slightest right to equate the ‘unifying significance’ of capitalism with the number of factory workers. To do so would be to narrow down Marx’s idea impossibly.**”*

Popoy recapitulates his argument that Philippine society is capitalist but backward due to the persistence of feudal forms of exploitation and accuses Joma of using the semi-feudal thesis as an alibi for the strategy of a protracted war.

The basic bourgeois, capitalist economic process has emerged and has gained ascendancy in almost a century of socio-economic evolution since the unfinished revolution of 1896. But capitalism in the Philippines remains extremely undeveloped, backward, deformed, stagnant, etc. We do not have any illusions that if it develops, advances and gets rid of its deformities and stagnancy, the sufferings of the proletariat and the toiling masses will be solved.

Imperialist domination not only in the country but in the entire world economy, and the persistence of feudal survivals not only in the economic but in the political life of society are the causes of this underdevelopment. It is in this sense—and only in this sense—that the “semicolonial and semifeudal” status of the Philippines should be understood. Imperialist domination in the country and the persistence of feudal survivals in society are the impediments to social and bourgeois progress and the development of the class struggle in the Philippines towards socialism.

After bringing into the forefront and emphasizing more strongly the bourgeois, capitalist basic economic process in the socio-economic evolution of Philippine society, does it mean that the necessity for a people’s democratic revolution is henceforth undermined, bypassed and sublimated, and a socialist revolution proposed as the immediate historical task? Nothing of this sort. Lenin analyzed Russian society as basically capitalist in its mode of production. But did he push into the forefront and emphasize more strongly that the immediate political task is a socialist revolution? Never. It was Lenin, based on his analysis of Russian society and application of the fundamental theories of Marxism, who insisted that the immediate task of the proletariat is the completion of the bourgeois revolution, and who first formulated a democratic revolution of a new type, a democratic revolution with the proletariat assuming the leading role.

What then is the significance of a correct analysis of Philippine society? It is not only a question of consistency in theory but a question of correct tactics. We will come to this when we discuss the “war revolution” strategy of Sison. Suffice it to say, up to this point, that this dogmatic and absolute fixation on his “semicolonial and semifeudal” analysis is but an alibi of Sison to justify his protracted war strategy of revolution.

These arguments raised by Popoy against the semi-feudal analysis of Philippines society must be addressed by adherents of the CPP. And beyond the theoretical debate, the empirical evidence for the assertion that the Philippines is semi-feudal is sorely lacking—such as the contention that 75% of the Philippine population is comprised of peasants as mentioned in PSR, an assertion that CPP activists repeat till today but in no way can be substantiated.

-

Protracted war as vulgarization of Marxist-Leninist theory and even Maoist strategy

Popoy’s first point is to immediately differentiate “people’s war” from “protracted war” as the former is really synonymous with revolution while the latter is a specific strategy. What the CPP really insists upon as a revolutionary strategy is protracted war.

*All revolutions are people’s war, it’s but another name for revolution. As Engels said: “**All revolution, whatever form it may take, is a form of violence.**” And Lenin said: “**Revolution is war**”. Both are referring to the violent character of revolution, to the necessity of revolutionary violence. But what specific form or combination of forms this revolutionary violence will take is a different question and is beyond the generic category of the term “people’s war”.*

*Mao’s protracted war is a people’s war, but a specific type of people’s war. What distinguishes it from other forms of people’s war? On two counts: **Mao’s concept of the three strategic stages of protracted war and his strategic line of encircling the cities from the countryside.***

Popoy reviews the history of the Chinese revolution and Mao's writings to reveal that Mao himself never asserted the universality of protracted war for semi-feudal and semi-colonial countries. Mao did not even prescribe protracted war as a strategy for the Chinese revolution until specific conditions arose in the latter period of their revolutionary struggle.

It belies the universality and absoluteness of the protracted war strategy even in China and stresses the historical context and particular conditions from which it arose in the development of the Chinese revolution.

At that time, China was already semicolonial and semifeudal. There as no unified reactionary rule, various warlords across China were engaged in incessant wars, imperialist powers contended for spheres of influence. The broad masses of the Chinese people were in revolt. In short all the factors for protracted war were present. But Mao never insisted that they should have pursued the line of protracted war even as early as the first period of the revolution.

Mao, in all his writings, never condemned this first period and the tactics pursued as "Left" adventurism, or in the words of Sison, as "urban insurrectionism". He even hailed the three armed uprisings in the latter period of 1927 as glorious revolutionary struggles of the Chinese working class.

Popoy asserts that Mao's concept of building Red political bases was based on the peculiar characteristics of the Chinese situation after the defeat of the first period of the revolution. Again, it was not because China was semi-feudal and semi-colonial.

Mao's concept of the emergence and long-term survival of rural Red political power depends on very concrete and peculiar conditions then prevailing in China. His concept of building rural Red areas is not simply the product of a general analysis of the semicolonial and semifeudal character of Chinese society but the product of a particular analysis of its peculiar features which he calls "special reasons" or "certain conditions" for the emergence and long-term survival of Red political power in the countryside.

Mao's particular analysis of the peculiar features of semicolonial and semifeudal China at given historical junctures determined the tactics (or what we usually call strategy) in conducting revolutionary struggle. In the first period, the revolutionary war was conducted through a united front with the Guomintang against the warlords and the imperialist powers. In the second period, under conditions brought about by the defeat in the first period, it was conducted through an agrarian revolutionary war, building rural Red areas and building a rural-based Red army in anticipation of a revolutionary high tide which will culminate in urban armed insurrections and the Red army advancing from the countryside. In both periods, the "strategy" or what should properly be called tactics was not protracted people's war and Mao supported the Party line as correct.

Popoy argues, based on a reading of Mao's writings, that protracted war as a strategy developed in response to the concrete conditions of the Chinese revolution in the war against Japanese invasion during the Second World War.

But it was really during the last years of the second period at the time that Japan began its war of aggression against China that Mao was able to systematize his protracted war theory into an integral strategy of revolutionary struggle. And it was only then that he was able to conceptualize such a strategy not because it was only at that time that he became "aware" of the correctness of such a strategy but because it was only then, during the impending war of aggression of Japan, that the conditions for such a strategy in China arose and become dominant. In the second period, Mao was more concerned on how the armed revolutionary forces can survive and develop in rural Red

bases through an agrarian war towards a nationwide revolutionary high tide, while in the third period, it was already a question of how the armed revolutionary forces can succeed from the strategic defensive to the strategic offensive, from the countryside to the cities through a strategy of protracted people's war.

Hence, in two historical periods of the Chinese revolution, Mao never advocated protracted war as the "strategy" for the Chinese revolution in the conditions prevailing in China in those times.

*Only by 1936-38, during the end of the second period and the beginning of the third period, during the transition and strategic repositioning from the second to the third period highlighted by the Long March, did Mao push forward the complete and comprehensive line of protracted war into an integral strategy as presented in his four basic military writings ("**Problems Of Strategy in China's Revolutionary War**," "**Problems Of Strategy In The Guerilla War Against Japan**", "**On Protracted War**," and "**Problems Of War And Strategy**").*

Even as Popoy takes Mao's interpretation of the twist and turns of the Chinese revolution seriously, the former critically interrogates the failure of the latter in explaining the causes of the defeat of the Red Army in the fifth campaign of encirclement and suppression by Chiang Kai-shek which directly led to the strategic retreat of the Long March. Still what is clear is that the rudiments of "protracted war" in the form of the building Red political power on the basis of an agrarian war ended in failure and defeat. This fact reinforces the specificity of the success of protracted war in the next stage, during the national war against Japanese invasion.

We now return to our main point—the universality and absoluteness of protracted war in a semicolonial and semifeudal country. What caused the defeat of China's second revolutionary civil war is beside the point and highly debatable as Mao's account and the available materials regarding the fifth "encirclement and suppression" campaign are quite inadequate. The essential point is this: There is no positive revolutionary practice that proves that an agrarian civil war can succeed along the path of protracted war even in China for the second revolutionary war ended in defeat!

But the Maoists will argue: The Chinese national democratic revolution or Mao's protracted people's war succeeded in the fourth period which was a revolutionary civil war!

The basic point, however, is this: Could it have succeeded without the victorious national war of liberation, the heroic war of resistance against Japan?

This is Popoy's crucial argument: Protracted war in China succeeded only under the conditions of a national war against foreign invasion. Moreover, in no other country did revolutionary movements that attempted protracted war as a strategy triumph.

The real and essential historical practice of protracted people's war was the War of Resistance Against Japan in the third period of the Chinese revolution (1937-45). It must be stressed that this was a national war and not a civil war. The total victory achieved by the three years of civil war in the fourth period (1945-49) cannot be detached and cannot be understood apart from the victorious eight years of national war in the third period.

The historical validity of protracted war based on the Chinese experience is essentially a question of national war. If we are to consider the Vietnamese experience as a validation of a protracted war strategy, it is also essentially a national war of liberation. These two revolutions are the only historical experiences in protracted war strategy and both succeed on the basis of successful national wars of liberation.

Revolutionary movements, proletarian led or influenced, in several countries throughout the world have assumed political power through democratic revolutions and they succeeded by various means peculiar to their national conditions. In all these people's revolutions, only China succeeded by means of a strategy of protracted war. Even Vietnam refuses to call its revolution a protracted war strategy and prefer to call it a political-military strategy.

So many Maoist revolutionary movements in Third World countries have attempted to duplicate the Chinese experience. Not a single one has so far succeeded for the past 44 years since the Chinese victory. Most have suffered terrible defeats. Only three major Maoist parties are persevering in protracted war: the Shining Path in Peru, the Khmer Rouge in Kampuchea, and our very own the New People's Army. And all are engaged, not only in a vulgarized type of Marxist-Leninist revolution, but a vulgarized type of Maoist protracted war and all are in the decline after decades of bloody warfare. Their ideological leaders are all like Mao's "frog in the well". To them, the universe is no bigger than the mouth of the well, and that universe is their Chinese paradigm of protracted war.

Popoy insists, and a review of Mao's writings on revolutionary strategy bears this out as well, that the question of strategy and tactics are dependent on concrete historical and political circumstances.

The more essential point is to insist that neither tactics nor strategy are universal formulas or unchanging absolutes based on general categories of socio-economic conditions. They are but forms of struggle concretely determined by the confluence and totality of factors in the historical development of a revolutionary struggle.

Reviewing Joma's Specific Characteristics of Our People's War and the CPP's actual practice, Popoy contends that protracted war in the Philippines was a vulgarized version of the Maoist revolutionary strategy.

Sison knows Mao's theory by rote and he tried to dogmatically apply it in Isabela during the early years of our people's war. But he got burned in his early baptism of fire. And because he does not have the grit and the wit of a military strategist and tactician and only the flair and fancy of a petty bourgeois pseudo-theoretician, he was confused by the complicated and peculiar circumstances of our war and began to grope and improvise pointing to the archipelagic character of the country as an excuse. What is despicable with Sison is he does not even have the intellectual honesty to admit his complete rupture with Mao's protracted war, and instead continued to use Mao's mantle to give credence to his contraband type of vulgarized protracted war.

Further, Popoy slams Joma for waging a vulgarized revolution that contradicts the Marxist conception of revolution as the outcome of class struggle.

To equate war with revolution, to treat war as the revolution is to negate the theory of the class struggle and vulgarize a Marxist-Leninist revolution. The basic law of revolution is the class struggle, it develops, advances, intensifies and triumphs on the basis of the development of the class struggle.

Popoy ended his critique of Joma's vulgarized war strategy with words that still ring true today, after 55 years of protracted war that remains stuck in the stage of ambushes and nowhere near achieving the strategic offensive and military victory.

We started a war in 1969 without a revolution. By 1986, because of this war strategy, we missed a revolution. And now, after two and half decades, what Sison wants us to reaffirm is this same, old

vulgarized war and vulgarized revolution.

-

National democracy as mass line versus socialism as class line

For Popoy, and this is his key point, Joma's Program for a People's Democratic Revolution (PPDR) exposes the latter's abandonment of the proletarian class struggle for socialism.

In the Party program, he substituted the Maoist "mass line" for the Marxist-Leninist "class line." He completely obscured and glossed over the struggle for socialism in his obsession for national democracy.

To substantiate this argument, Popoy explains, with the ideas of Marx and Lenin as basis, what is a party program and what should its content.

What is a Party program?

It must principally be a statement and a formulation of the most basic views of the party of the proletariat, which serves as a fundamental premise of all the remaining parts of the program—its political and practical tasks, including its minimum program.

What should be the essence of the program of a proletarian revolutionary party?

It can not have any other essence but to organize the class struggle of the proletariat and to lead this struggle, the ultimate aim of which is the conquest of political power by the proletariat and the establishment of a socialist society. This class struggle of the proletariat, this emancipation of the workers must be the act of the working class itself.

Hence, the need for an independent class party of the proletariat, the need for an independent class program of the proletariat.

Popoy insists that from a Leninist conception, the role of the democratic revolution can only be understood from a proletarian perspective once the place of socialism as the ultimate aim is fundamentally laid down. In contrast, with Joma, national democracy is front and center while socialism is consigned to the far background. For Popoy, the proletariat leads the democratic revolution because it paves the way for the socialist revolution. But for Joma, CPP activists should fight for national democracy since they are pro-people, pro-peasant and pro-Filipino.

Here lies the fundamental error of Sison's presentation of the necessity for a "people's democratic revolution." He presented it from a national democratic viewpoint not from the socialist viewpoint, from the class struggle of the revolutionary proletariat.

The Filipino proletariat stands for a national democratic revolution, which is bourgeois in character whether it is of the old or new "type," not precisely because the proletariat is pro-"peasant" (as a class) and pro-"people" (beyond class), not because the proletariat is a "democrat" and a "patriot" (in the bourgeois democratic sense).

We are for a national democratic revolution—and this we should teach to the Filipino working class with all clarity—because it clears the way for the free development of the class struggle of the

proletariat which is directed towards the attainment of its ultimate aim. We are for an agrarian revolution, for the complete abolition of all feudal remnants because it clears the way for the free development of the class struggle in the countryside. We are for a national revolution, for self-determination because only through political democracy can we attain the free and full development of the proletariat as a class.

The essential problem with Sison's PPDR is that what it understands and presents is a democratic revolution "with" a socialist perspective—meaning, a socialist "future." Not a democratic revolution "from" a socialist perspective—meaning, a socialist starting point, a socialist framework, a socialist viewpoint. In short, from the class position of the revolutionary proletariat.

Popoy explains that Joma was able to evade talking about socialism and to relegate the socialist revolution to the backburner by pushing the semi-feudal analysis of Philippine society and refusing to grasp its capitalist development.

In its program, the revolutionary party of the proletariat is expected to formulate in the most unambiguous manner its indictment of Philippine capitalism and the world capitalist system. To dispense with this question by simply describing Philippine society as "semicolonial and semifeudal" and obscuring its capitalist basic process of socio-economic evolution is to evade a cardinal question in a working class program.

What is the programmatic significance of this insistence on the correct characterization of the economic developments in the country from the point of view of the proletariat?

It is of utmost importance because it "determines" our ultimate aim, it provides a concrete, historical basis in our country for a socialist maximum program and a clear framework for the development of the class struggle of the proletariat from the democratic to the socialist stage of struggle which is our paramount concern side by side with social progress. The Party of the proletariat cannot proceed to the democratic revolution and aspire to lead it in the real meaning of class leadership and advance it to its completion without going through this process.

Relatedly, Popoy underscores that the rationale for proletarian leadership in the democratic revolution is so that the revolution continues on to the next stage, the socialist struggle. This implies that the working class should first of all be conscious that its real aim is socialism, and on the basis of this understanding, be the vanguard of the democratic revolution.

This is a new-type of democratic revolution because, with the leading role of the proletariat in the people's revolution, it will be a continuing revolution towards the transition to socialism. It will and it must smash all the remnants of feudal and colonial rule to facilitate the free development of the class struggle.

Its difference from the old type is not in its content but in its form and direction, in the role the proletariat must take in the interest of its socialist revolution. Sison cannot explain this essential difference because he forgot his socialism, his starting point is not socialism and social progress but merely the injustice of feudal and foreign rule just like a true-blooded democrat and patriot.

In line with the national democratic orientation and mass line, the CPP deserted its task of **principally organizing** the class struggle of the proletariat. Instead it dispersed its cadres and members to organize the struggle of the democratic classes and the whole people. As a consequence, proletarian leadership of the democratic revolution has been **reduced to leadership of the Party not the working class itself.**

How can the Filipino working class assume their historic role, when its vanguard, the CPP, instead of “concentrating” its attention and activities upon them, opted to “concentrate” its attention and activities on the peasantry as the main force of the revolution, opted to concentrate its forces in the countryside building its peasant base areas, calling upon urban forces to continuously shift to the countryside, and branding those who stress urban work as “reformists” and “insurrectionists.”

How can the Filipino working class assume their historic role, when its vanguard, the CPP, instead of teaching them socialism and the class struggle instill on them the bourgeois spirit of “national democracy” and insist that their working class movement is “national democratic in orientation” and not socialist, and those that teach them otherwise are deviationists from the Party line!

For Sison, and this is categorically clear in PPDR, and also by virtue of his sins of theoretical omission—proletarian class leadership is reduced and equated to the party leadership of the supposed proletarian vanguard, the CPP. For Sison, it is the party assuming the role of the class, and that’s all there is to it. This is Sison’s Stalinist and Maoist reductionism in all its vulgarity on the question of class leadership.

As final point, Popoy tackles the agrarian program of a proletarian revolutionary party, which is important in general but most specially for a backward capitalist society like the Philippines.

What is an agrarian program of a Communist Party?

It is a definition of the guiding principles of the policy of the party of the class conscious proletariat on the agrarian question, i.e., policy in relation to agriculture and the various classes, sections and groups of the rural population.

Big landowners, agricultural wage-workers, and peasants—these are the three main components of our rural population. But since ours is a “peasant” country, the Party’s agrarian program is chiefly a proletarian program defining our attitude towards the peasant question, a proletarian program in a peasant revolution that is directed against the survivals of feudalism, against all that is feudal in our agrarian system.

This lays the foundation for carefully crafting the program of the proletarian party with regard to the peasantry. Taking off from Lenin, Popoy argues that the proletarian party makes a distinction in formulating demands for the workers—which it defends as a class in present society—and the peasantry—which it cannot promote as a class of small producers in capitalism.

*According to Lenin: “**We make the legitimacy of ‘peasant demands’ in a Social-Democratic program dependent, firstly, on the condition that they lead to the eradication of remnants of the serf-owning system, and secondly, that they facilitate the free development of the class struggle in the countryside.**”*

*According to Lenin: “**For the workers, we demand such reforms as would ‘safeguard them from physical and moral degeneration and raise their fighting capacity’; for the peasants, however, we seek only such changes as would help ‘to eradicate the remnants of the old serf-owning system and facilitate the free development of the class struggle in the countryside’. Hence, it follows that our demands in favor of the peasants are far more restricted, that their terms are much more moderate and presented in a smaller framework.**”*

Why this class difference, why this “class bias”? Here is Lenin’s explanation: “**With regard to the wage-workers, we undertake to defend their interests as a class in present-day society. We**

do this because we consider their class movement as the only truly revolutionary movement... and strive to organize this particular movement, to direct it, and bring the light of socialist consciousness into it."

How about the peasantry, do we defend them as a class? According to Lenin, no, "we do not by any means undertake to defend its interest as a class of small landowners and farmers in present-day society. Nothing of the kind."

Popoy asserts that Joma's "basic principles"—that the peasantry is the main force of the revolution and that land to the tiller is the main content of the democratic revolution—are contradictory to Lenin's analysis of the agrarian question.

In the light of all these guiding principles of Marxism-Leninism, and most specially the last point cited from Lenin, how should we now evaluate Sison's platform on the peasant question? How should we now understand in terms of consistency in principle and political expediency Sison's formulation that the "peasantry is the main force of the people's democratic revolution," the "peasant struggle for land is the main content of the people's democratic revolution," and his preaching, his advocacy (and not only "support") of the "Land to the Landless" peasant slogan in our program?

So, this is Sison's agrarian revolution—reverting the rural propertyless masses into property owners. The party of the class conscious proletariat is concentrating its forces and attention in the countryside, abandoning the industrial proletariat in the cities, enduring extreme sacrifices in a bloody protracted war to advance a "struggle for land" as the "main content" of the revolution that seeks to revert the propertyless semiproletarian and proletarian masses in the countryside into petty bourgeois property owners and commodity producers! So, this is Sison's idea of social progress, of developing the productive forces in the countryside and developing the class struggle of the proletariat in the democratic revolution—the bourgeoisification of the countryside.

Popoy sums up his critique of Joma's political line of national democracy as nothing more than advocacy for a type of national capitalism that thoroughly vulgarizes the Marxist-Leninist standpoint on the continuing revolution from the democratic to the socialist.

But for Sison, in the supposed proletarian program of the supposed working class revolutionary party, what he offers to the Filipino proletariat is nothing more than national democracy—the overthrow of foreign and feudal rule. To the industrial working class, he offers them "national industrialization." To the agricultural working class, he offers them a "parcel of land" which they can call their very own, a promise to revert them from miserable propertyless masses into aspiring property owners in a generalized system of small commodity production. This is Sison's program for a people's democratic revolution of the working class party—a program of revolution for bourgeois rule.

In conclusion, no Filipino revolutionary cannot but salute the CPP for its steadfastness and sacrifices in waging the struggle to overturn the rotten system in the country. But waging the protracted war for more than half a century with little prospect for victory should be a wake-up call for any revolutionary organization.

It is incumbent upon the CPP leadership and membership to seriously and judiciously examine its theory and practice to truly rectify errors. And this involves interrogating the critiques that revolutionaries such as Popoy Lagman have brought to bear on the "basic principles" laid down by Joma Sison which cannot be treated as dogma that are unquestionable.

Asa Proletaryo

Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino

P.S.

- Labor Party - Philippines. Sunday, January 7, 2024:
<https://partidongmanggagawa2001.blogspot.com/2024/01/dogmatism-not-empiricism-is-cpps-basic.html>

Footnotes

[1] <https://philippinerevolution.nu/statements/rectify-errors-and-strengthen-the-party-unite-and-lead-the-broad-masses-of-the-filipino-people-in-fighting-the-us-marcos-regime-advance-the-peoples-democratic-revolution/>