

CPP founder Sison regurgitates Stalinist lies about Trotskyism

By Peter Symonds
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Historian Joseph Scalice delivered a lecture on August 26 that provided a detailed exposure of the assistance provided by the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) in the rise to power of the current fascistic Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte. Scalice also examined the programmatic roots of this betrayal in the Philippines of Stalinism and its subordination of the working class and peasant masses to the so-called progressive wing of the bourgeoisie—in this case Duterte.

In an interview published a day before the lecture in a special edition of the CPP's publication *Ang Bayan*, CPP founder Jose Maria Sison sought to preempt the event with a slanderous and completely unsubstantiated attack on Scalice as a paid CIA agent and "Trotskyite." Sison also accused Scalice of "red tagging"—identifying organisations in the National Democratic movement with the CPP and thereby targeting their activists for persecution or assassination. Not only are the political ties between the CPP and its front organisations widely known, but the chief political responsibility for Duterte and his death squads lies with Sison and the CPP who helped him to power.

Sison followed up his extraordinary attack on Scalice with a second interview in another special edition of *Ang Bayan* on August 31 devoted to defending his claim, based on the Stalinist two-stage theory, that the Philippines is a "semi-colonial, semi-feudal society." According to the two-stage theory, countries such as the Philippines first require a bourgeois democratic revolution to enable a protracted period of capitalist development thus relegating any fight for socialism to a second stage in the distant future.

The panicked and hysterical reaction by Sison clearly points to a party in deep political crisis, which is itself bound up with the worsening crisis in the Philippines itself accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and rapid deterioration of the global economy. Having assisted Duterte into office and initially backed his murderous "war on drugs," the CPP, in line with powerful sections of the Philippine bourgeoisie, is turning towards Vice-President Leni Robredo, and attempting to cover its tracks by flagrantly lying about its past record.

The opportunist manoeuvres of the CPP over decades have alienated broad layers of youth and working people, a fact which was reflected in the wide interest in Scalice's lecture. As *Ang Bayan's* introduction to Sison's second interview noted, "there is marked increase in intellectual and political discourse on the matter especially among the Filipino youth." It is not enough, however, to be disgusted with the CPP's treachery. It is necessary to understand its theoretical roots in Stalinism and to take up the revolutionary alternative of Trotskyism that Stalin and his henchmen sought to bury beneath a mountain of lies, and to silence with their murderous purges.

Sison's second interview, defending his politically bankrupt "semi-colonial, semi-feudal" thesis, is a desperate bid to stem the haemorrhaging of support for the CPP, and to suppress any questioning in its ranks.

The Philippines certainly remains an oppressed country dominated by

imperialism but to claim that it is "semi-feudal" flies in the face of reality. Focused exclusively on national developments and national conditions, Sison argues that the economy in the Philippines is a peculiar stunted stage of partially developed national capitalism, that he terms semi-feudalism. What dominates in the Philippines and other countries of a belated capitalist development are not feudal or semi-feudal relations, but the world capitalist market and capitalist economic relations. Whatever remnants of pre-capitalist society continue to exist are entirely subordinate to the requirements of capital, especially international finance capital.

Sison's false assessment of Philippine society is to justify the CPP's opportunist search for alliances with the so-called progressive wing of the national bourgeoisie—which has resulted in one disaster after another for the Philippines masses. Following the Maoist variant of Stalinism, it is also the basis for an orientation, not to the working class, but to the peasantry and peasant guerilla warfare as a means of putting pressure on the national bourgeoisie.

The CPP, unlike many of its counterparts around the world, is yet to exchange its M-16s and military fatigues for seats in parliament and corporate boardrooms, but it is not for want of trying. Its de facto alliance with Duterte, which led to members of its front organisations assuming posts in his administration, was just the latest attempt. Meanwhile in the countryside, its armed wing, the New People's Army, is diminished in size and areas of operation, and has fragmented as local units have forged their own ties with local businesses.

Sison first elaborated his "semi-colonial, semi-feudal" thesis in his book *Philippine Society and Revolution* under the pseudonym Amado Guerrero. It was false 50 years ago, and it remains false today. In his interview, he performs elaborate contortions in an effort to "prove" that the peasantry still constitutes the majority of Philippine society despite the huge growth of the proletariat above all in the greater Manila area with its population of 20 million and the huge changes not only to the Philippine, but also the global economy.

The Philippines, he claims, is not fully capitalist because it lacks a self-contained industrial base with its own machine-building industry and cannot "produce machine tools, vehicles, computers, basic chemicals, medicines and other capital goods and major manufactures." Yet with the globalisation of production over the past 40 years, no country in the world has a self-contained industrial base. All, including the very largest—US imperialism—are integrated into the processes of production of global capitalism.

This points to the fundamental flaw in Sison's argument—the parochial national framework of his analysis. Leon Trotsky explained in his critique of the draft program of the Third International in 1928 that in the present epoch of imperialism—of world economy and world politics—"not a single communist party can establish its program by proceeding solely or mainly from conditions and tendencies of development within its own country."

The alternatives are, as Trotsky explained, the program of socialist

internationalism or “socialism in one country,” the program of Stalinism. More than 90 years on, it is even more evident today that the working class can solve none of the problems it confronts—the huge gulf between rich and poor, looming environmental disasters, anti-democratic and dictatorial methods of rule and the growing danger of world war—within the framework of the nation.

The oppressive conditions facing workers in the Philippines, not to speak of the millions of Filipinos forced to work overseas, are the product of global production processes dominated by finance capital that can only be fought by building an international movement of the working class. Sison refers to the social disasters produced by the so-called “neo-liberal policies” associated with global capitalism. However, the globalisation of production over the past 40 years is not simply a policy that can be turned on and off, but is the result of profound objective changes in the world capitalist system.

Sison hails Mao and Stalin for supposedly building socialism in one country in China and the Soviet Union, but can offer no explanation for the restoration of capitalism in both countries. The globalisation of production undermined all programs of national reform based on national economic regulation, producing deep crises in the shut-in, autarkic economies of China and Soviet Union. Having based their entire existence on a rejection of the perspective of world socialist revolution, the Stalinist and Maoist apparatuses liquidated what remained of the gains of the Russian and Chinese revolutions and opened their doors to global capital.

Sison’s falsifications in the political sphere parallel those in the theoretical sphere. In his desperation to defend his claim that the Philippines is “semi-feudal,” he dredges up the old Stalinist misrepresentations of Trotskyism and manages to cram them all into a single sentence.

The “Trotskyites,” Sison declared, are pushing “the long-discredited Trotskyite line that there ought not to be two stages in the Philippine revolution because socialism is already the immediate issue, that there is no need for the people’s democratic revolution, that the peasantry and the middle bourgeoisie are reactionary forces that should be kept out of the national united front, that the strategic line of protracted people’s war by encircling the cities from the country should be discarded and that the workers must do all the revolutionary struggle and share no power with the peasant masses.”

Firstly, the two-stage theory was not the perspective of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, but of their political opponents, the Mensheviks, who sought to subordinate the working class to a section of the Russian “democratic” bourgeoisie and its party, the Cadets. Like Lenin, Leon Trotsky, in his theory of Permanent Revolution, established that the capitalist class in countries of a belated capitalist development like Russia and the Philippines was organically incapable of carrying out the tasks of the democratic revolution.

It is not that the democratic tasks carried out in the great bourgeois revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries—including national independence, democratic rights and agrarian reform—do not exist. Rather the bourgeoisie—subordinate as it is to global capital on the one hand, and tied by a million strings to the big landowners in the countryside on the other—cannot carry them out. It is confronted in the 20th century with its mortal enemy the proletariat that poses a direct threat to its interests. A revolutionary upheaval on the scale needed to refashion society necessarily leads to the mobilisation of the working class that will fight for its class interests and threaten the private ownership of the means of production.

It is a gross misrepresentation to declare that Trotskyism regards the peasantry as “a reactionary force.” What Trotsky did explain in his Theory of Permanent Revolution was that the peasantry, as a heterogeneous, dispersed class of landowners, was incapable politically of acting independently. Its upper stratum merged with the big landowners

and rural businessmen while its lower layers reached into the landless peasants and rural proletariat. As such, the peasantry will follow one or other of the two main classes in the cities—the bourgeoisie or the working class.

Thus, it falls to the working class, supported by the peasantry, to carry out the bourgeois democratic tasks. But in doing so, the proletariat necessarily uses its own class methods and begins to make deep inroads into capitalist property relations. That is, the democratic tasks merge with the commencement of socialist tasks.

The chief objection to Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution prior to 1917 was that the seizure of power by the small Russian proletariat surrounded by a sea of peasants would be premature. However, in the epoch of imperialism, the death agony of capitalism, which opened up in 1914, the world capitalist order is more than ripe for socialism, it has begun to rot. The seizure of power by the working class in any one country necessitates its extension on an international scale and merges with the struggles to overturn capitalism globally.

It was this perspective of world socialist revolution, at the heart of Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution, that guided the October Revolution that led to the seizure of power by the Russian working class. The new Soviet government immediately legitimised the seizure of the landed estates by the peasantry and turned to the international working class for support. It was not the size of the Russian proletariat, or for that matter the size of the Philippine working class in 1969 or today, that was decisive but rather its character as an international class and its central role in the means of production in confronting the capitalist class.

Moreover, as any examination of the early years of the Soviet Union makes clear, the conception that guided Lenin and Trotsky was not the Stalinist caricature of a simultaneous revolutionary uprising. For them, what was essential was the development of the Third International as the world party of revolution to develop, reinforce and co-ordinate the struggles of the working class provoked by the crisis of global capitalism. Stalin’s rejection of this perspective and his adoption of the nationalist outlook of socialism in one country led to the undermining and betrayal of the revolutionary struggles of the working class and ultimately to capitalist restoration—as Trotsky predicted as early in 1936.

In the case of China, it was the Maoist variant of Stalinism, which was based on the peasantry and armed guerrilla warfare, that produced the deformed workers’ state that emerged from the 1949 revolution. Mao and the Chinese Communist Party, resting on its peasant armies, deliberately suppressed the struggles of the working class before and after the revolution. Even more rapidly than in the Soviet Union, Mao’s version of “socialism in one country” ended in a blind alley from which Mao sought to extricate China by turning to US imperialism with Nixon’s visit in 1972. This paved the way for capitalist restoration from 1978 onwards.

The lecture by Dr. Scalice provides an important antidote to the lies and falsifications of Sison and the CPP and an exposure of their Stalinist politics. There was and is a consistent revolutionary alternative to Stalinism based on Marxism and the perspective of world socialist revolution—Trotskyism, as fought for by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). Amid a resurgence of the class struggle internationally, what is required is theoretical and political clarity on the reasons for the past defeats and betrayals and the building of revolutionary leaderships based on the political lessons of the struggle of the Trotskyist movement against Stalinism and its apologists. We encourage workers, youth and intellectuals to begin this process by making a serious study of the works of Leon Trotsky and the ICFI.

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