

Philippine Maoist leader Sison seeks alliance with military against Duterte

By Tom Peters
22 September 2020

A webinar hosted by the International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS) on September 11 shed further light on why the Stalinist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) has reacted with such fury to the exposure of its support for fascist President Rodrigo Duterte before, during and after the 2016 election.

Jose Maria Sison, the founder of the CPP and "chairperson emeritus" of the ILPS, has repeatedly lashed out at historian Dr. Joseph Scalice, whose August 26 lecture, "First as Tragedy, Second as Farce: Marcos, Duterte and the Communist Parties of the Philippines," documented the CPP's support for Duterte and other capitalist politicians since its founding in 1968. Sison has slandered Dr. Scalice as an agent of the CIA and an informer for the Duterte regime, while repeating discredited Stalinist lies about Trotskyism.

The ILPS webinar, entitled "Importance and Program of the National Democratic Revolution," continued these attacks, while defending the Maoist-Stalinist program of class collaboration with so-called progressive sections of the bourgeoisie, including factions of the military.

Sison spoke alongside Renato Reyes Jr., secretary-general of Bayan, an alliance of organisations that follow the political line of the CPP. Asked by the moderator to comment on "Trotskyite attacks on the ND [national democratic] movement and its supposed role of enabler of Duterte," Reyes raised the Maoists' main concern: "The recent attacks," he said, "come at a time when the Philippine people, the mass movement and the opposition are trying to build the broad united front against Duterte... [The Trotskyists] are seemingly trying to put a wedge within the united front by attacking those belonging to the national democratic movement."

The CPP and the "national democratic movement" (Bayan and its associated parties) are seeking to cement a "united front" with Leni Robredo, the vice-president, her bourgeois Liberal Party and sections of the military leadership to oust Duterte (see: "Political crisis in the Philippines intensifies").

Masses of young people and workers hate the Duterte regime, which has unleashed a campaign of mass murder and terror against the poor in the guise of a "war on drugs." The wilfully negligent response to the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in thousands more deaths and exacerbating social inequality, is driving more and more people to the left.

Bayan and the CPP are offering their services to politically subordinate the movement against Duterte to the pro-Robredo faction of the bourgeoisie, and prevent the emergence of an independent socialist movement. The broad support for Dr. Scalice's lecture threatens to undermine this politically criminal operation by "putting a wedge" between the Stalinist organisations and workers and young people who are looking for a genuine socialist perspective to fight against fascism, inequality and militarism.

Reyes declared that it was "unfair and dishonest" for Dr. Scalice to say that Bayan had supported Duterte, given that "so many activists have been arrested, have been killed, subjected to militarisation, displaced" by the regime.

In fact, political responsibility for risking the lives of activists rests with the leadership that promoted illusions in Duterte. Bayan chairperson Carol Araullo, for example, described Duterte in *Business World* on May 24, 2016, as "an avowed leftist and socialist." After referring to the four cabinet posts that Duterte had offered to individuals nominated by the CPP, she said there were "positive signs of how well, how fast

and how far he will and can go towards instituting genuine change with the Left behind and alongside his Presidency.”

Reyes wrote on July 4, 2016, after Duterte’s murderous campaign was well underway: “[T]o be immediately confrontational every time the President said something disagreeable during the past month would have weakened the alliance.” He appealed to his readers, “We should at least give him a chance.”

Sison, for his part, praised Duterte repeatedly and hailed him as the Philippines’ “first left president,” with a “socialist orientation.”

Sison, Reyes and other “national democratic” leaders are desperately seeking to cover up this record, in order to maintain some credibility in the eyes of the masses and to be able to serve Duterte’s rivals in the Filipino ruling class—including the armed forces.

Asked about the prospects for ousting Duterte, Sison replied that “Robredo as the constitutional successor can get enough support from the military.” Robredo and the military, in turn, had to be supported by “gigantic mass actions... similar to those that ousted Marcos in the period of ‘83 to ‘86.”

During that period, the CPP helped maintain bourgeois rule by calling for a passive boycott of the 1986 election, rather than putting forward an independent alternative to the bourgeois opposition. The mass movement mobilized against Marcos was channeled behind Corazon Aquino and factions of the armed forces, along with Washington, withdrew their support for the dictator Ferdinand Marcos. The CPP began to enthusiastically promote Aquino’s presidency.

Sison stressed that a “majority of military officers are patriotic and pro-US, but anti-China,” whereas Duterte had sought to strengthen trade and investment ties with China while maintaining the US alliance. Amid the escalating drive towards war by Washington, Duterte faces opposition from the military and pro-US factions of the bourgeoisie grouped around Robredo. The CPP is increasingly depicting Duterte as a puppet of China, which Sison labelled an “imperialist” power threatening the Philippines.

In an article on February 26, Sison said he had “friendly contacts with some police and military officers,” who told him that “anti-Duterte and pro-US officers” were particularly angered by Duterte’s threats

to terminate the Visiting Forces Agreement with the US military. The Maoist leader wrote that “gigantic mass actions” would “embolden the pro-US officers in the military to turn against Duterte and have him replaced” by Robredo.

Julie de Lima, Sison’s wife and the chairperson of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) peace negotiations panel, announced on September 17 that the NDFP would take the unprecedented step of bypassing the government and negotiating directly with Robredo for a resolution to the armed struggle waged by the CPP’s New People’s Army. De Lima stated that the negotiations with Robredo’s Liberal Party should become “a rallying point in the effort to oust Duterte.”

In summary, the Philippine Stalinists propose to support a capitalist government resting on the military and US imperialism. Such a regime would not represent a progressive alternative to Duterte; it would deepen the assault on the working class and accelerate preparations to join a US-led war with China.

Those seeking a socialist alternative must study the program and history of Trotskyism, embodied in the International Committee of the Fourth International. This is the only movement that fights for the political independence of the working class from every faction of the bourgeoisie, on the basis of an internationalist program aimed at uniting workers in the Philippines with those coming into struggle against capitalism throughout the world.

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