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Philippines

# What can we learn from Fidel Agcaoili's "Rejoinder"?

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**For years, the evolution of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), of its military wing, the New People's Army (NPA), and of its politico-diplomatic arm, the National Democratic Front (NDF) has been a subject of discussion within the Philippine Left. The importance of this issue has begun to be felt within the international progressive movement. Still, for those who are not already familiar with the situation in the archipelago, it must be very difficult to fully grasp what is actually happening there. How can normal activists, especially young ones in Western countries, understand a reality so foreign to their own experience, to their own outlook, to the world they live in -so dark and so frightening?**

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/P6010098.jpg>]

Fidel Agcaoili

Early March, I wrote a factual "preliminary report" on the scope of the CPP policy of assassination. [1] A month later, Fidel Agcaoili, one of the highest-ranking officers of the CPP-NDF based in Europe, issued in his official capacity a violent "rejoinder to the slanderous article of French Trotskyite Pierre Rousset". [2] As Chairperson of the NDF Human Rights Committee (!!!), he justifies the killing of many former members of his party, of cadres of other components of the Filipino Left. Agcaoili also accuses me of many evils. Nevertheless, before responding, I have to thank him, and to thank him twice.

First for helping me correct my "preliminary report". I wrongly spelt the name of Lito Bayudan, and I presented Leopoldo Mabilangan as former head of the NPA Banahaw Command while he has been its spokesperson (I was told so before, but forgot). These two corrections will be introduced in the later, more complete, version of my report.

Second for confirming in such a striking way most of what I explained in my previous writings on the CPP-NPA-NDF assassination policy. Agcaoili's "Rejoinder" expresses very clearly the present political outlook of the CPP; we can learn a lot from his contribution.

Answering Agcaoili could be very brief. Reading his "Rejoinder", anyone with a minimum of experience can see how much his outlook is ultra-sectarian. Anyone can see that the CPP-NPA-NDF has killed activists from other Left movements and intends to kill more of them. Nevertheless, today's CPP benefits, among progressives, of the prestige and moral high-ground gained at the time of the struggle against the Marcos dictatorship; and the deep changes which occurred in this party the past twenty years are not always understood. The CPP leadership's words are still taken for granted in parts of the international solidarity movement. It then seems necessary to analyze Agcaoili's contribution and to present additional references and historical data to those already given in my previous writings.

The existence of a plural progressive and revolutionary movement in the Philippines is the result of a political history, not of an "imperialist plot". Many in the present non-CPP Left are coming from the CPP-led National Democratic tradition of the 1970-1980s; they can legitimately claim part of its legacy. Today's Sison-Tiamzon CPP leadership does not have a monopoly over this tradition. I would rather think that it betrayed the best of it.

We are confronted with a very specific problem. The CPP leadership degenerated to the point of threatening militarily the Philippine independent Left and people's movements. But the NPAs have not become landlords' goons (even if they can tactically ally with them against another Left organization) or traditional bandits in the same way that it happened to some armed groups before. I'll try to address this unusual issue at the end of my contribution.

Difficult then to be short. My aim is not only to answer Agcaoili's "Rejoinder". I also hope to make some political sense of a polemic which could otherwise become terribly destructive.

## FROM A SOLIDARITY STANDPOINT

According to Agcaoili, I have "made a career out of attacking and trying to discredit the Philippine revolutionary movement". With his paper reaching many persons who know nothing of my past and present involvements, I feel compelled to first make my standpoint clear. For forty years, I have been engaged in solidarity activities toward Asian people's struggles -and for the last three decades, it has especially been the case in relation to the Philippines. Something Fidel Agcaoili surely remembers: when I was campaigning for the release of CPP-NDF political detainees, he was one of them. It is true that once released, Agcaoili forgot to acknowledge the solidarity work done from France. But contrary to him, Jose Maria Sison did recognize it, after I mobilized all my networks for his right to political asylum in the Netherlands. Sison even offered me his book "The Philippine Revolution" [3] with a handwritten dedication. To quote: "To Pierre, in friendship and with best wishes! Joema, Utrecht, Sept. 13, 1990".

Sure, at that time already, the International Department of the CPP was labeling me a "counter-revolutionary". But Sison was not used to offer friendship to CIA agents... Indeed, there must be something wrong with the tale Agcaoili tells us.

It is precisely because I have been for so long active in the international solidarity movement that I am today fighting for the right of a plural progressive and revolutionary Left to exist in the Philippines.

## TO DEFEND THE WHOLE LEFT

This fight includes the rights of the CPP and CPP-NDF allied forces.

Agcaoili reminds us that the Philippine state has assassinated "leaders and activists of open mass organizations and political parties tagged by the Philippine military as "CPP fronts". True. He adds that none of the Filipino Left organizations I "anointed" has "raised even a squeak against the latest spate of state-sponsored killings". False. This is one of the many straight lies in Agcaoili's papers -by straight lie I mean that documentation proving the contrary is easy to find and that Agcaoili knows that he is not telling the truth.

Let's give two examples here. Walden Bello has published a strong protest after the recent assassinations referred to by Agcaoili and ends his article by an offer of unity: "To the CPP and its friends, let's get beyond political partisanship and work together to stop the killings". [4] Akbayan as well repeatedly denounced the assassination of legal activists "aligned with the Lower House's national-democratic bloc "Bayan Muna, Anakpawis, Gabriela-as well as with Bayan". [5]

I myself never stopped denouncing the role of Washington in the Philippines and the responsibility of the Philippine state in the repression of members of these organizations. [6] In recent years, I have participated in two international peace missions in the Philippines. The first one was in the southern island of Basilan which exposed the motives and implications of US military intervention in the archipelago. [7] The second took place in May 2005 to record and combat election-related violence. The issue of the CPP-NPA-NDF "Permit to Campaign" policy was of course addressed. But we duly recorded as well the assassination of activists of Bayan Muna and other organizations "tagged by the Philippine military as "CPP fronts" (to quote Agcaoili) by death squads, goons, etc. [8]

Fidel Agcaoili also pretends that "none" (none!) "of the groups anointed by Pierre Rousset as "independent revolutionary Left parties' have been attacked by the Philippine military". False again. For example, the government is not very eager for peace talks with the Revolutionary Workers Party-Mindanao and its Revolutionary People's Army (RPM-M/RPA) to progress. The Revolutionary People's Army camp in Lanao was even attacked and bombed by the military under the Fourth Division in 2002. Harassment remains a permanent feature of the situation in Central Mindanao. Unfortunately, the RPM-M/RPA is simultaneously targetted by the NPA.

The whole Left has to be defended against the state, the Military, the paramilitary and the goons. Unfortunately, part of the Left has also to be defended against the CPP-NPA-NDF. Quite symbolically, some of the CPP-NDF detainees I campaigned for in the 1970-1980s are now threatened by their former comrades, and their lives are in danger. They are the very same ones! The international solidarity movement cannot but face this reality.

The fact that activists who are members of or ideologically close to the CPP are threatened by death squads cannot justify the assassination by the CPP-NPA-NDF of members of other Left organizations!

## A FIRST CONFIRMATION: THE RANGE OF THE THREATS AND KILLINGS

As mentioned above, in his "Rejoinder", Fidel Agcaoili confirms many things I previously wrote.

The killings. This is true for the range of assassinations committed by the CPP-NPA-NDF. For sure, Agcaoili and I sharply disagree on why people I named in my "preliminary report" have been killed. But he officially recognizes that they have been killed by the NPA and that they did belong to the various organizations I mentioned. Thus, there is no dispute on the range of the killings.

Lagman. There is only one exception, concerning the case of Popoy Lagman. Agcaoili wrote in his "Rejoinder" that "despite all evidence, Pierre Rousset insists that the CPP is responsible for Lagman's murder". This is another straight lie. In my "preliminary report", I wrote: "some suspect the NPA of this murder but the CPP denies any responsibility". There are several hypotheses concerning the assassination of Filemon "Popoy" Lagman, and I am not in a position to know the truth.

In 2001, I wrote in a mission report: "The CPP is not the only source of deadly factional violence. After the overthrow of Estrada, Popoy Lagman was assassinated. (...) Nobody seems to hold the CPP responsible for this murder. But it will be very important for this crime to be cleared up because suspicion poisons the atmosphere in the left." [9] In July 2003, I wrote: "Popoy Lagman was killed two years ago and it is not sure who did it, unlike the other cases mentioned here". [10] In October 2003, I wrote: "As far as I am concerned, I never claimed that the assassination of Popoy Lagman was done by the NPA. I even thought it was probably not the case, but I was of course -and I am still- unable to conclude on who masterminded it". [11]

Fidel Agcaoili has in his possession at least three of the four papers here quoted. He nevertheless "insists" to pretend that I "insist" to blame the CPP-NPA-NDF for Lagman's murder. I took the pain to quote my writings because it shows that I do try to get at the truth -and when I do not know who is the culprit, I say so. It also shows that Agcaoili does not give a damn about the truth.

The threats. Agcaoili explains that with regard to "other groups like Siglaya, Alab Katipunan, Bisig, BMP, IPD, Pandayan, Sanlakas, etc., the CPP wages ideological and political struggle in the nature of struggle of ideas vis-À

-vis these groups". These are mass organizations, coalitions and mass fronts or, in the case of Bisig, a political current which never was in the CPP.

Stating so, Agcaoili openly admits that against other political parties of the independent Left (especially those of communist reference) and some mass movements, the confrontation is not limited to a "struggle of ideas" and can take a military character. The threat is directed here against Akbayan, the CPLA, the MLPP, Padayon, the PMP, the RPM-M, the RPM-P, the Peace Foundation and the Task Force Bondoc Peninsula (and the peasant movement), as well as many former leaders of the CPP... Mass leaders can be targetted because they are identified by the CPP with one of these organizations. Nobody can feel safe after reading Fidel Agcaoili.

Freedom From Debt Coalition (FDC), one of the main progressive coalitions in the Philippines, published a strong letter in reaction to the publication of Ang Bayan's diagram of counter-revolutionary organizations in the Philippines: [12] "Among those named in the CPP's recent 'list' are officers, long-time activists and partners of FDC, namely our Vice-President, Ricardo Reyes; Secretary-General Lidy Nacpil; leaders of organizations who are members of the FDC Board: Manjette Lopez and Sonny Melencio; past FDC board members Isagani Serrano, Joel Rocamora and Etta Rosales who is now a parliamentarian; and Walden Bello with whom FDC has worked closely at the national and international arena. The charges of the CPP against them are unfounded. (...) The leadership of the CPP and its allied organizations should immediately withdraw their recent issuances and desist from further attacks against political activists and groups in the progressive movement. We call on them to stop the killings and end its policy of violence to settle differences with other left and progressive groups. We urge all other democratic and progressive organizations to take a stand against this policy of intolerance and violence, and to join efforts to foster unity in advancing the people's struggles towards a better world for all". [13]

## A SECOND CONFIRMATION: PLURALISM IN THE LEFT IS THE ISSUE

As in other countries, the Filipino Left and people's movements are politically plural. It is quite normal, but pluralism in the Left is precisely what the CPP-NDF cannot admit; which is confirmed once more in Agcaoili's "Rejoinder".

For Agcaoili, pluralism in the Left is an object of contempt. I am defending the right of a pluralist progressive and revolutionary Left to exist in the Philippines. "Here, we have the real agenda of Trotskyite Pierre Rousset" responds Fidel Agcaoili. I agree. But he then identifies pluralism with "instigated splits" (which I don't agree): "The new Trotskyists advocate 'pluralism' to instigate splits in the Left. What Pierre Rousset actually wants is a fragmented and collaborationist 'Left'". Never (never!), Fidel Agcaoili recognizes that other political trends in the Left than the one led by the CPP can be genuinely progressive and revolutionary. All the other groups are denounced as "counter-revolutionary" and "pseudo-progressive".

I have already offered a thorough analysis of the threatening meaning of the "diagram" of "counter-revolutionary groups" in the Philippines and their supposed "links with Trotskyites and Social Democrats", published in December 2004 by the CPP. [14] Agcaoili tells us that this publication "is part of an effort to explain to the members of the Party and allied organizations and to the Filipino people about the nature of these groups". So, such is the way the CPP "educates" its members and the Filipino people: pretending that ALL other political currents in the Filipino Left are "counter-revolutionary" and are linked internationally to "counter-revolutionary" movements.

The only distinction Agcaoili makes is that some of the organizations and the individuals listed in the "diagram" are the object of ideological and political struggles, while others are also military targets. This distinction is very shallow and subject to changes depending on the CPP leadership's sense of opportunity. Walden Bello, for example, is

supposed to be the target of ideological and political struggle only. But he has been denounced as an active agent of the US and Philippine secret services (see the documentation in my January 18, 2005 paper). He is now officially accused to have "assisted the Arroyo regime's fascist minions in its campaign to vilify Philippine mass-based movements against imperialist globalization in order to set them up as targets of the regime's campaign of political suppression and assassination". [15] These accusations are ludicrous, but it is precisely on such charges (spy, blood-debts...) that a kangaroo "people's court" is asked to sentence to death an activist, when the CPP leadership finds it convenient. How can we trust the CPP-NDF claim that most activists listed in Ang Bayan are safe from physical threats, when they are denounced in exactly the same fallacious terms as those who were killed?

Walden Bello is Chair Emeritus of Akbayan; and several officers of this legal party have already been murdered. One can then understand that Akbayan has issued a new urgent appeal, underlining that the "threats against Walden Bello reaches danger point". [16]

Very significantly also, Agcaoili tells us that the CPP's "allied organizations" (its own words) are actively engaged in the political campaign against the other left organizations: "The CPP and its allied organizations go to the people to explain to them the dangers of reformism and 'left' revolutionism advocated by some of these groups that can derail or hinder the further advance of the people's struggle". The problem is that this "educational" campaign against "counter-revolutionaries" is used by the CPP to justify its assassination policy. We then have both the right and duty to ask the CPP "allied organizations" to clarify their stand regarding these assassinations.

## THIRD CONFIRMATION: POLITICAL DIVERGENCES AT THE ORIGIN

In his "Rejoinder", Fidel Agcaoili confirms what I explained about the origins of the present situation. Political divergences grew within the CPP at the end of the 1980s. From his point of view, "errors" committed during the 1980s needed to be "rectified", but then the "main proponents behind these errors" decided to "sneak out of the CPP" (what a vocabulary!).

New debates. The emergence of political divergences within the CPP at that time was unavoidable, normal. The world had changed. The situation in the Philippines had changed. The party had been politically destabilized at the time of the Marcos Dictatorship's downfall in 1986. It had lived through a deeply traumatic experience (the 1980s' paranoid purges). [17] Political practice was more and more diverse, depending on the regions. The CPP members never had the occasion to assess collectively their experience: one peculiarity of the CPP's history is that in nearly thirty years, it never held a congress (the first and founding congress, where only a handful of activists met, remained the only one). [18]

During the 1980s, a rich debate emerged within the ranks of the CPP. It concerned many issues: the balance sheet of the 1986 policy of electoral boycott; the program of the NDF; internal party democracy; people's democracy; lessons from international revolutionary experiences (Vietnam, Nicaragua, El Salvador...); Leninism, Stalinism and Maoism... [19] It was at first tolerated by the core leadership, but this did not last long. The debate did not stop but, because of the unwillingness of the Executive Committee to have it organized, it could not reach many regions and members.

The 1992-1993 crisis. In the early 1990s, a congress was badly needed to sum-up the situation and discuss the orientation. The Sison-Tiamzon faction decided to do without and to impose, top-to-bottom, its own line. Instead of an internal debate, it launched a "rectification movement". The initial 1968 line was "reaffirmed" and opposition views were disciplined. [20] It proved impossible even for the Central Committee to meet with all its members. Until the end,

those calling for a re-evaluation of their party's orientation asked for a congress to be organized. [21] But splits became unavoidable due to the Sison-Tiamzon's refusal to see the "Reaffirm" document discussed within the party, as stated in the "Joint Statement" of the "Democratic Opposition". [22]

Political divergences, lack of democratic process within the party and disciplinary onslaught from the Sison-Tiamzon faction opened the 1992-1993 crisis of the CPP. The same degree of intolerance from the CPP leadership led to a later split within the ranks of the "Reaffirms" themselves, in Central Luzon, giving birth to the Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines (MLPP).

Both Agcaoili's presentation and mine underline the political background of the conflicts within the Philippine communist movement in the 1990s. We disagree however insofar as I consider these divergences legitimate and he does not; insofar as Agcaoili upholds the Sison-Tiamzon faction's decision not to organize a party congress while I consider that by doing so it carries the main responsibility in the 1992-1993 party crisis.

The agrarian issue. Agcaoili also mentions that the "Peace Foundation/Task Force Bondoc Peninsula has been trying to organize peasants in the Bondoc Peninsula in Southern Quezon around the promise of 'land' transfer through the CARL" (the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law). The CPP does not want landless peasants to fight for the implementation of the land reform law; a move it judges "reformist". It subordinates the development of a mass peasant movement to the needs of the armed struggle, which he considers, whatever be the political situation, as the "primary form of struggle". The end result is that in the name of revolution, the CPP-NPA often limits present peasant demands to minimum ones (i.e. lowering of the rents), postponing the fight for land ownership to an undated future.

Many other Left organizations, including among those who came out of the CPP, project another line, where the fight for land reform begins here and now; where the expansion of a mass legal peasant movement is not limited in the name of revolution; where "reforms" and "revolution" are not systematically counterposed to one another. This is for example the case of Padayon, which is among the political movements presently most targetted by the CPP. [23]

This is what is debated upon in the Philippine Left: the changing relationships between armed struggle and other forms of struggles; the relationships between underground and above-ground activities as well as between parties and people's mass organizations; the dialectics between reform and revolution -or between rural and urban struggles; the building of political and social alliances in the fight for socialism; the plural character of the "people's camp" and a people's conception of democracy; etc. There are many different answers to such questions. Positions are still evolving and the debate is far from being closed. Old and new conceptions are confronted and combined. In that respect, the Philippine Left is very much alive and living through a decisive period of political re-evaluation and refoundation - except for the CPP-NDF-NPA which considers that nothing meaningful has changed since 1968 and that it alone possesses the Truth.

## A FOURTH CONFIRMATION: THE "CRIMINALIZATION" OF POLITICAL DIVERGENCES

Things were already bad enough in 1992-1993, when the CPP crisis led to expulsions and splits. But the Sison-Tiamzon leadership faction decided to take another step with far-reaching consequences. Political divergences were transformed into so-called "criminal cases". Agcaoili names in his "Rejoinder" five "main proponents" of erroneous lines: Arturo Tabara, Romulo Kintanar, Filemon Lagman, Ricardo Reyes and Benjamin de Vera. They were top leaders of the CPP: Politburo members, head of the NPA or of key territorial Party Committees... What Agcaoili forgets to recall is that they were all sentenced to death by the CPP leadership already in 1993. Some less

well-known activists were also sentenced to death, like Joel Rocamora, a fellow of the Transnational Institute (who held no significant position within the CPP). Leopoldo Mabilangan was killed to show the others how real the threat was.

Assassinations progressively spread and threats extended. Nevertheless, for ten years, many of us hoped reason would come back to the CPP leadership. These hopes were eventually dashed in January 2003: the killing of Romulo Kintanar meant that the policy of assassination was becoming nation-scale. Activists who have been sentenced to death, killed and threatened spent years of their lives building the revolutionary movement in the Philippines. They often played key roles in the CPP at national or regional levels. It may be time to ask some first and hard questions to those, in the international solidarity movement, who presently back the claims of the CPP.

Do you really think that ALL the most well-known figures defending "dissenting" views within the CPP were ALREADY "criminals" in 1992-1993, when they were first sentenced to death?

Do you really think that ALL the Left organizations in the Philippines, which do not belong to the "Reaffirm bloc" (and defend the same ideological line as the CPP), are "counter-revolutionary"?

## THE LACK OF CREDIBILITY OF THE CPP'S CHARGES

Agcaoili presents in his "Rejoinder" long lists of crimes people killed by the CPP-NPA-NDF were supposed to have committed. But, too often, the accusations lack credibility. I'll show it through some examples.

I wrote on the Romulo Kintanar assassination in my previous 2003 writings and I shall not come back on it here. Except to add one remark. The CPP published the list of "criminal charges" against him only after he was killed. Among them, there were decisions which were in fact taken by the CPP Politburo itself, or by the Utrecht-based CPP leadership -something we all knew at the time. If the charges had been published when he was still alive, Kintanar could have answered. One of the reasons for his murder was surely to shut his mouth, forever.

The CPP-NDF always presents the list of "crimes" supposedly committed by activists as a matter-of-fact, giving often dates, names, etc., to back its accusations. One should not be fooled by the way charges are presented. Assertions can be plain inventions. Let's recall the cases of Filipinos who happen to be well-known internationally. Anyone familiar with Lidy Nacpil from Jubilee South and FDC knows she is not a counter-revolutionary. Anyone familiar with Walden Bello knows that he is not a rabid defender of the WTO world-order, an agent of US or Philippine government, and a collaborator helping the Military to target Left activists for assassination. Anyone familiar with Joel Rocamora knows that he surely did not deserve to be sentenced to death in 1993 (hoping that he is not going to be sentenced again in the coming future).

Even if I am less well-known, I would like to present one case I know fairly well: mine.

The Case of The French Trotskyite Embedded In Attac. The CPP-NDF considers that the World Social Forum has a "reformist and counter-revolutionary character"; some others do too. Sison pretends that the WSF was notably conceived "as a reaction to the announced process of forming the International League of People's Struggles", which is rather... surprising: I guess that none of us -we were manyâ€" who were involved in the launching of the World Social Forum knew about the Coming Arrival of the ILPS. A more serious matter is the way Sison introduces the "plot" in the midst of the political polemics: "in 2000 US intelligence operatives under the cover of the Ford



## What can we learn from Fidel Agcaoili's "Rejoinder"?

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Foundation prodded some French Trotskyites embedded in Attac and Le Monde diplomatique and some crypto-Trotskyite academics and journalists to engage the collaboration of social democrats in France and Brazil and bigwigs of NGOs in order to form WSF". [24]

There are many ongoing polemics on the World Social Forum process, and it is perfectly normal: it is a new and complex phenomenon comprising different types of movements and visions. But Sison's message to "Mumbai Resistance 2004" offers a typical example of how the CPP-NDF invents stories in order to "criminalize" political disagreements, transforming activists into agents under the orders of "US operatives". Sison is not interested in the real history of the social forums; neither Agcaoili in Attac. Far from being limited to the taxation of currency transactions as he pretends (by the way, it seems that Agcaoili is against imposing a new tax on Capital!), Attac activities embody a wide range of issues: in defense of public services, of pensions and workers' rights; against neoliberal counter-reforms, etc. Presently, Attac is engaged in the campaign for a "Left no" to the European Constitution because of its capitalist, neoliberal and militarist content. Again, truth does not matter for the CPP-NDF leadership.

Another aspect of the CPP-NDF leadership's methods is that it often adds a touch of "character killings" to its attempts at a political kill. Thus, according to Agcaoili I cannot be anything else than an "arm-chair activist long ensconced as a staffer in a cozy office at the European parliament". It is true that I worked five years for the European United Left / Nordic Green Left Group in the EP. Nothing shameful about it, nor especially "cozy": as it is usual for activists, I retained from my salary only the equivalent of a party full-timer's wage and utilized the rest to finance political and solidarity activities. My job with the EP is now over. What is interesting is that Agcaoili had phoned himself to the EUL/NGL Group in the European Parliament to verify that I was no longer employed there. He knew perfectly well my situation when he wrote his "Rejoinder". But on small (and petty) things as well as on bigger ones, he really never renounces a useful lie.

I wish to take one last example of the CPP-NDF leadership's methods, drawn from my own experience. In the 1980s two internal CPP papers have been written against "Trotskyism" and myself. They were both utterly slanderous and were given to me by an NDF member: "You have the right to know what is said about you" he told me (many party and front members did not agree with the sectarianism of their leadership at that time). I happened to meet years later the one who had written these two papers. He happily explained that he never tried to know what my organization was, or what I was actually doing. He had to make a kill, so he did. "I was a good soldier of the party", he explained joyfully.

In the Bondoc Peninsula. The situation in the Bondoc Peninsula being especially grave, I wish to give here more data than in my previous papers.

Both Sison and Agcaoili violently denounce as "gangs" the peasant movements which are active in the Task Force Bondoc Peninsula. To quote Sison: "Akbayan has organized local armed gangs acting as the barangay intelligence network (BIN) and paramilitary units of the armed forces of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP)". [25] As I mentioned in my "preliminary report", one of their leaders was assassinated by the NPA (Reymundo Tejino killed on 4 February 2002) - and three others by the landlords: Edwin Vender killed on 8 June 1998, Rodolfo Romero killed on 3 October 2003 and Felizardo Benitez killed on 20 March 2004. These murders have been committed in especially atrocious ways, as an act of terror: Edwin Vender's genitals were mutilated with a jungle bolo and his brain was fed to the pigs.... [26]

The Bondoc Peninsula peasant movement is continuously harassed by the landlord's goons; its leaders are killed. The human rights abuses committed there have been documented already in September 2003, by a fact-finding mission. The team included, among others, Joy G. Acheron from the National Anti-Poverty Commission and several members of Foodfirst Information Action Network-Philippines (FIAN-Philippines). [27] Later, FIAN sent an

## What can we learn from Fidel Agcaoili's "Rejoinder"?

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international team and stated its concern on the security situation of the peasants and the slow implementation of the land reform program. [28]

The Bondoc Peninsula case illustrates the nature of the existing divergences on the agrarian issue between the CPP-NPA-NDF and peasant federations as Makammasa, which are fighting for land to be given to the tiller now. In a recent declaration, the local Maria Theresa De Leon Command of the NPA states that "at present, the level of implementation of the revolutionary agrarian program is to achieve minimum objective. These are the lowering of land rent and interest rates, increase in the wages of the farm workers, increase in the prices of agricultural produce, and in the reduction of production expenses. (...) The maximum objective of taking control and distribution of lands to poor farmers who are landless or those who do not have enough land to farm would be realized on a national scale on the eve of the success of national-democratic revolution, with the pronouncement of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines". [29] So, the peasants have to await the "eve of the success" and the pronouncement of the CC of the CPP before being allowed to fight for land ownership.

The Philippine Ecumenical Action for Community Empowerment (PEACE) titled its response to the NPA Maria Theresa de Leon Command: "Respect the Farmers' Lives and their Right to Choose". It compares point-by-point the agrarian program projected by the landless and land-poor peasants' autonomous associations it works with to the one of the NPA: "For the CPP-NPA, giving lands to the farmers in the absence of 'overthrow of the state' is taboo. (...) PEACE disagrees. The right to land is a human right; it is the most basic and essential of the integrated bundle of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights that especially the rural poor should have the right to. (...) This is why it is important for peasants to own the lands they till, to protect them from the dictates and oppression of landlords who would deny their right to have rights". [30]

Several of the political parties, which are projecting a different line than the CPP leadership's one, are themselves coming from the Communist Party. If they changed their orientation on the agrarian issue, it is because of experience. But the CPP-NDF leadership presents any divergence on this matter as a confrontation between "revolution and counter-revolution", and denounces the proponents of other lines as "agents" of the military. The CPP-NDF is still looking for Dioscoro Tejino to kill him, regardless of his past support to the NPA. [31] Faced with this situation, the Association of Major Religious Superiors of Women in the Philippines (AMRSWP) issued a strong statement in solidarity with Dioscoro Tejino. [32]

It is time to ask more questions to those who, in the international solidarity movement, endorse blindly all CPP-NDF claims:

Do you really think that there is no room, in the Philippines, for genuine political differences among revolutionaries and progressives on issues of line, orientation and strategy (as on the agrarian program)? And if there is room for such divergences, how is it that the CPP-NDF treats all of them as if they were the expression of counter-revolutionary forces?

How can you endorse and spread accusations against Filipino activists, members of various Left organizations, when you know that the CPP-NDF is using such accusations to justify their assassinations? Don't you think that you are taking a very grave responsibility doing so?

The non-CPP aligned Left organizations in the Philippines are urgently asking for solidarity from the international progressive movement, to urge the CPP-NDF to stop its policy of assassination. Do you really think that we should turn a deaf ear to their call?

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE NDF

One of the most revealing aspects of Agcaoili's "Rejoinder" is that he signed it as Chairperson of the Human Rights Committee of the National Democratic Front. It tells a lot on the CPP's conception of human rights and on the very nature of the NDF.

The National Democratic Front was established in 1973. From the origin, the NDF member-organizations were the CPP, its NPA and its underground sectoral fronts. No other political party or organized political current could be part of it. For very long, the NDF was only represented by a "preparatory commission" and had little life of its own. Nevertheless, discussions developed during the 1980s to give the NDF more substance, to update its program and to envisage the possibility to integrate other political trends. The first NDF Congress was prepared by the CPP leadership organs during a long period of time. In the early 1980s, the concept of the NDF as a united front of different political forces was raised in the discussion; but in 1985, the CPP leadership disregarded this option.

Lost opportunity. The NDF's First Congress took place in 1990. It introduced in its program notions like the principles of democratic pluralism and mixed economy (within the framework of a dominant and controlling state sector and other forms of collective ownership). There was no formal endorsement of working class leadership, through the CPP, over the NDF. The NDF was presented as a federation and political center. For the first time, the NDF was formally organized, with processes and rules governing its conduct. It was not a united front opened to several political trends (all the member-organizations were lead by CPP members), but it was beginning to have a political function and (potentially) a life of its own.

That was already too much for Jose Maria Sison. The CPP leadership declared in 1992 that decisions of the First NDF Congress were null and void. Without any democratic process, elected leadership members of the NDF were disfranchised by the Sison-Tiamzon faction. These organizational moves raised many reactions within the NDF. Five members of the NDF National Executive Committee and fourteen members of its National Council issued a common statement to "reaffirm the validity and integrity of the 1990 NDF Congress and its decisions". [33] But to no avail. From then on, the NDF is little more than a name.

In the EP. I have had recently a first-hand experience of what it means. In my January 18, 2005 "New Letter of Concern", I explained that the European United Left/Nordic Green Left Group in the European Parliament had to cut off its relations with Bayan Muna (at that time the only "Reaffirm" electoral Party in the Philippines) after it refused to condemn the assassination of Romulo Kintanar. It was a very serious matter for the CPP-NDF, which sent a delegation of two to meet our Parliamentary Group: Fidel Agcaoili and Grace Punongbayan. The meeting took place in Brussels, March 31, 2003, with Stellan Hermansson (Deputy Secretary General of the EUL/NGL Group, from the Swedish Left Party) and myself.

During the whole meeting, Agcaoili and Punongbayan defended the CPP-NDF system of "people's courts" and "revolutionary justice". At the end of the meeting, Stellan Hermansson asked Fidel Agcaoili to guarantee that the NPA will not kill Ric Reyes. He first refused to answer but finally said that if his case was presented to a "people's court", the NPA would have to arrest him. If he did not "resist" arrest, he would not be killed on the spot but brought to court, judged, sentenced and then... (in reality, no one is given the chance "not to resist": targets are gunned down right away). [34] What was most frightening in this encounter is that Agcaoili and Punongbayan came to the Parliament to convince Parliamentarians to resume solidarity activities. They have been living in Europe for many years. And yet, they did not seem to understand that any normal European Left Parliamentarian would be scared away by their discourse.

Ric Reyes is accused by the Sison-Tiamzon leadership to be the main culprit in the 1980s' paranoid purges within the CPP. [35] In fact, many leadership bodies and members, including top ones from Sison's faction, share

responsibility in this dark side of their party's history. Ric Reyes has proposed to Sison to "have an impartial body to deal with this issue, not your kangaroo court. And of course, not one coming from this government which has not done justice to the thousands of victims of human rights violations under the Marcos, Aquino and Ramos regimes. Let the process be fair and thoroughgoing, no matter who gets hurt. This we owe to the victims [of the internal purges] and their families, to everyone who joined the movement and to the younger generation of activists who deserve to be freed from the moral burden of this injustice". [\[36\]](#)

There was no answer to this offer. Ric Reyes is still actively looked for by the NPA and could be killed anytime. Meanwhile, the CPP-NDF present leadership is freely vilifying activists and sentencing to death cadres of other Left organizations. Too bad for human rights.

## CONTRADICTIONARY EVOLUTIONS IN THE PHILIPPINE LEFT

One of the many bizarre assertions repeated time and again by Agcaoili is that everything is clear in the Philippines and confusion exists only abroad. In his "Rejoinder", he wrote that my "lies have no effect in the Philippines". In a sense, it is true: Filipinos certainly do not need me to know what is at stake. But many organizations from the Left and people's movements, many progressive individuals, reject the pretension of the CPP to have the monopoly of Truth; and the so-called "facts" Agcaoili refers to are hotly disputed. Polemics are raging.

The Philippine Left has changed tremendously these last twenty years. Two main trends are at work.

What has the CPP become? In the mid-1980s, the CPP could have evolved in several ways. The proof of it is that various components of it actually did evolve quite differently. There are many reasons for which the majority of the party leadership apparatus changed for the worst (the main one may be the deeply demoralizing effect of the 1980s' paranoid purges). In my own understanding, a qualitative degeneration occurred at the turn of the 1990s, which needs to be understood in depth. How did it happen? I am far from having all the answers to such a question, but I feel that it is more than time to address the issue. I shall briefly present here some first and very personal elements of analysis.

From a revolutionary Marxist point of view, we have had to understand in the past the transformation of the social-democratic labor movement (leading to the betrayal of 1914) and, later, Stalinism. The first process of degeneration is in essence easy to address, even if there were many debates on its mechanisms and scope: bureaucratization of the labor movement's top apparatuses and their cooptation into the social elite. The second process (Stalinization) was much more difficult to approach because it occurred in a historically new situation: a non-capitalist transitional society. It took time to understand how bureaucratization could grow from within the state to the point of giving birth to a new and very specific type of bureaucracy, of social elite.

We are now confronted with a third, different, process. It does not lead to the cooptation in the bourgeois social elite. It does not occur in the framework of a transitional society state. It gives birth to a totalitarian power structure to which traditional class definitions are not easy to apply. The first time I was confronted with this question was in 1975: Pol Pot's Khmers Rouges. This faction shaped and took control of the Cambodian CP (killing all cadres supposedly linked to the Vietnamese) before the seizure of power. Can we say it was "proletarian" while its first act once in power was to disintegrate the existing proletariat and semi-proletariat? Can we say it was "peasant" when it soon submitted the peasantry to forced labor? Can we say it was "bourgeois" when it destroyed all elements of capitalist economy, including money?

## What can we learn from Fidel Agcaoili's "Rejoinder"?

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In the 1970s, we could have thought that the Khmers Rouges phenomenon was unique, because of specific historical circumstances related to the way Cambodia was brought into the Indochina wars by US intervention. But there is a larger trend, probably incarnated by Shining Path in Peru or today's CPP. With the violence of class domination (national and international) and its consequences (militarization) as background. With armed struggle as framework (control of arms and money allowing the emergence of a new power structure). And, like in previous processes, with social uprooting as one key mechanism changing the very fabric of an organization. But we need to go much deeper in the analysis if we want to understand what happens. Armed struggle is, most of the time, not a "free choice" but an act of self-defense faced with the violence of the dominant classes (this is what gives it legitimacy). Many armed groups did not degenerate in the same way as Shining Path or the CPP and when they did, they usually turned to banditry "while ideology is still an essential element of cohesion for the CPP.

Activists who joined the CPP gave away everything (career, family...) to "serve the people". The very same ones (or, to be precise, some of them: the majority of the early 1980s CPP members are no more in it and many evolved quite differently) now impose their own power over people's organizations. Much beyond simple "vanguardism", such parties build themselves as a leading faction of society. How did such transformation happen? Why did it occur in some parties and not in others -or in some sectors of a given party and not in others? What are the elements of continuity and the qualitative changes in this process? The answer needs a very concrete analysis of the trajectory of each party, combining its ideology, politics, organization, social roots, etc. It also calls for a theoretical framework of understanding.

"Classical" Marxism and "class analysis" constitute an essential part of this theoretical framework: the revolutionary transformation of societies is first of all a process of self-emancipation, which implies people's self-organization and self-initiatives. To limit the danger of internal degeneration of the revolutionary movement, this process of self-emancipation has to be put back at the center stage of conceptions, politics, strategies and struggles. But to get into the fabric of the phenomenon, I feel that we have to add other elements of analysis like finer social analysis (evolution of layers of the radical intelligentsia...), as well as elements borrowed from psycho-sociology (transformation of uprooted individuals...) or from gender-based studies on power relationships. Surely, much can be discussed on such a matter. But it is an urgent task to grasp this issue in depth, to find the appropriate response to this new form of totalitarianism growing from within our own ranks and struggles.

The CPP rose above the people. At the same time, for many, it continues to represent a class-based revolutionary party. Mass organizations it leads are part of people's movements. They should be included in a progressive united front policy. This must not be forgotten. But such a "complexity" is nothing new. We already had to address it with social-democracy and Stalinism.

The plural Left. There is another face of the Philippine Left. One can study step by step the process leading to the degeneration of the CPP (Sison-Tiamzon faction) during the last twenty years. One can also study step by step the growth of a plural progressive and revolutionary Left. The two trends developed side by side.

The emergence of a broad plural Left in the Philippines is conflicting and certainly not linear. There have been ups and downs, missed opportunities and bad failures. The CPP's threats make it much more arduous: they tend to militarize the Left itself and some groups may never assimilate a people's democratic culture. Differences in lines are sharp and will remain so. But tremendous steps forward have nevertheless been made. New debates have now begun, on strategies and program, which will probably go beyond the point reached during the 1985-1998 years. A precious experiment is at work, under harsh conditions. It needs our solidarity.

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## What can we learn from Fidel Agcaoili's "Rejoinder"?

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We, in the international progressive and solidarity movement, do not need to agree on the elements of political analysis presented here to act together in defense of the whole Philippine Left. But it would be good to discuss the lessons of the history of the revolutionary movement in the Philippines, and to learn from it.

We, in the international movement, are not a tribunal. We do not have to judge which, if any, of the CPP's accusations against Filipino activists may be true. This is not our task and we do not have the means to do so. But we have to face reality. The CPP extends a threat over the whole independent Left. In his own words, Fidel Agcaoili's "Rejoinder" illustrates it.

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[1] Pierre Rousset, "[The CPP-NPA-NDF's 'Hit List'. A preliminary report](#)", March 8, 2005.

[2] Fidel V. Agcaoili, "Rejoinder to the slanderous article of French Trotskyite Pierre Rousset", end of March 2005.

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Rejoinder to the slanderous article of French Trotskyite Pierre Rousset

[3] Jose Maria Sison, *The Philippine Revolution. The Leader's View*, Crane Russak, NY 1989.

[4] Walden Bello, "Uniting against the Assassinations", *Business World*, April 13, 2005 and *Inq7.net*, April 14, 2005.

[5] See the latest statement signed by the Executive Committee of Akbayan Citizens' Action Party, "Stop the Assassination of Left Activists: Justice to the Victims of Extra-Judicial Killings", April 4, 2005.

[6] Europe solidaire sans frontières, "Assassinats et disparitions: la responsabilité de l'Etat et du gouvernement philippins est engagée", 3 avril 2005.

[7] "Basilan: The Next Afghanistan? Report of the International Peace Mission to Basilan, Philippines, 23-27 March 2002.

[8] COMPACT for Peaceful Elections, "A Consolidated Report of Incidents of Violence for the Period Feb- 30 April 2004" and "Summary of Election-Related Violence. Media reports, dated 1-11 May 2004".

[9] Pierre Rousset, "LCR Delegation (EUL/NGL). Mission report. Philippines, April 10-26, 2001".

[10] Pierre Rousset, "After Kintanar, the killings continue. The post-1992 CPP assassination policy in the Philippines", July 4, 2003.

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**The post-1992 CPP...**

[11] Pierre Rousset, "The post-1992 Communist Party of the Philippines and its policy of 'death condemnations'. A response to the July 26, 2003 document of the National Democratic Front (based on CPP-NDF's own statements and documents)", 6 October, 2003.

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**After Kintanar...**

[12] International Department of the CPP, "Links of counterrevolutionary groups with Trotskyites and Social Democrats", *Ang Bayan*, December 7, 2004, p. 8. *Ang Bayan* is the official news organ of the CPP.

[13] Freedom From Debt Coalition, January 25, 2005 letter signed by Ana Maria R. Nemenzo, President.

[14] Pierre Rousset, "[In solidarity with the Filipino progressive movements threatened by the CPP. A new Letter of Concern](#)", January 18, 2005.

Some "links" between Filipino and international organizations mentioned in this diagram do not exist.

[15] CPP, "On political assassination of antiglobalization activists and Walden Bello's Red-baiting", Statement by the Communist Party of the

## What can we learn from Fidel Agcaoili's "Rejoinder"?

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Philippines, March 25, 2005.

[16] Akbayan, "An Urgent Appeal To Condemn The Assassination Policy Against Akbayan Chair-Emeritus Walden Bello By The Communist Party of the Philippines", Executive Committee, Akbayan Citizen's Action Party, April 5, 2005, Manila.

[17] The founding Congress of the CPP was officially held December 26, 1968 (birthday of Mao Zedong). It was called the Congress of Reestablishment of the Communist Party of the Philippines after the betrayal of the "old" Communist Party (PKP).

[18] I speak of paranoid purges, because they were not political, in the sense factional. I do not mean that "paranoia" is a sufficient explanation of why such purges occurred. Many factors have to be taken in account to understand how it could happen.

[19] See for example the two issues of *Praktika* (May 1986 and August 1986); the many documents presented in "Crisis of Socialism, Strategy of Action and Internal Democracy: Study, Debate, Discussion, Summing Up. Profound Re-examination and Revitalization" (417 pages); and the eleven issues (from 0 to 10) of *Debate*, *Philippine Left Review* (March 1991 to August 1994).

[20] "Reaffirm our Basic Principles and Rectify the Errors. Amended and Approved by the Executive Committee of the Central Committee, Communist Party of the Philippines, 5 March 1992".

[21] See for example from the Manila-Rizal Regional Committee (KR-MR), "Pambansang Kongreso ang konstitusyonal na solusyon sa krisis ng Partido" ("A National Congress is the Constitutional Solution to the Crisis in the Party"), Mayo 2, 1993.

[22] Democratic Opposition: "Out of Crises, Renewal (A Joint Statement of the Democratic Opposition within the Communist Party of the Philippines, December 26, 1993). This statement was signed by Victor del Mar for the Visayas Commission and the Regional Committees of Negros, Central Visayas and Panay; by Roberto del Castillo for the National Peasant Secretariat; by Laya Bonifacio for the International Department (Democratic Bloc); by Ike de los Reyes for the Mindanao Party Organization (Democratic Bloc); and by Camilo del Pueblo for the United Front Commission.

For their part, members of the CPP regional organization in Europe formally declared their autonomy on 17 December 1993. In a press statement, they condemned moves taken by the Executive Committee of the CPP to bring to "people's court" at least four known leaders of the opposition: "NDF-Europe Condemns Threat of 'Show Trials'", 17 December 1993, signed by Byron Bocar and Sixto Carlos, Jr., NDF-Europe Spokespersons.

[23] Padayon, "Of Hitlists and Diagrams (Padayon's Response to the Ang Bayan article "Links of Counter-revolutionary Groups with Trotskyites and Social Democrats")".

[24] Jose Maria Sison, General Consultant, International League of People's Struggle, "Message of Solidarity To Mumbai Resistance 2004", January 17, 2004. The Fourth World Social Forum took place in Mumbai (India), in January 2004. The gathering of Mumbai Resistance 2004, politically dominated by the CPP and similar forces, was organized at the same time as the WSF in a nearby site.

[25] Prof. Jose Maria Sison, National Democratic Front of the Philippines, Chief Political Consultant, January 30, 2005: "Ric Reyes is criminally culpable for Kampanyang Ahos".

[26] Task Force Bondoc Peninsula, "Stop the Human Rights Abuses of the Landlords and the New People's Army (NPA) in Bondoc Peninsula!". The TFBP is a liaison of ten national and international non-governmental organizations working for agrarian reform and human rights in Bondoc Peninsula.

[27] Task Force Bondoc Peninsula, "Living Dangerously in San Vicente. A Humanitarian Mission Report on the Agrarian Reform & Human Rights Situation in Barangay San Vicente, San Narciso, Quezon, Philippines", September 2003.

[28] Foodfirst Information & Action Network (FIAN), "Putting agrarian reform into practice - a deadly task. A Fact Finding Mission Report on Agrarian Reform and the Human Right to Adequate Food in Barangay San Vicente, San Narciso, Quezon, Philippines", November 2003.

## What can we learn from Fidel Agcaoili's "Rejoinder"?

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[29] NPA, Maria Theresa De Leon Command, "Regarding: The Complaints of Akbayan-Peace-BDP-KMBP and the Armed Group of Pedro Tejino on the Alleged Violation of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law of Maria Theresa De Leon Command in Connivance with the Uy Family of Barangay San Vicente, San Narciso, Quezon, August 1, 2004.

[30] Philippine Ecumenical Action for Community Empowerment (PEACE) Foundation Inc., "Respect the Farmers' Lives and Their Right to Choose. Response to the New People's Army-Maria Theresa De Leon Command's Virulent Statement Against PEACE Foundation, Inc. Dated August 1, 2004", September 7, 2004.

[31] Dioscoro Tejino Jr., "In the Eyes of the Maria Theresa De Leon Command-New People's Army, I Have Committed a Crime and I Deserve to Die", September 14, 2004.

[32] Association of Major Religious Superiors of Women in the Philippines (AMRSWP), "Solidarity Statement. Non-State Actor's Accountability for Agrarian and Human Rights: the Case of Dioscoro Tejino, Jr of Bondoc Peninsula", August 18, 2004.

[33] This statement is called "April 23 Declaration" (1993). See also, for example, Paco Arguelles, "On Liwanag et al's Harangues Against the First Congress of the NDF", 24 April 1993.

[34] Pierre Rousset, "A meeting with the NDF in Brussels", letter, April 4, 2003.

[35] Prof. Jose Maria Sison", National Democratic Front of the Philippines, Chief Political Consultant, January 30, 2005: "Ric Reyes is criminally culpable for Kampanyang Ahos.

[36] Ric Reyes, Former CPP leader, "To: Jose Maria Sison", January 23, 2005.