

Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières > English > Asia > Philippines > The Left (Philippines) > CPP (killings) (Philippines) > **From a distance**

After the arrest of J. M. Sison in Utrecht

## From a distance

Monday 3 September 2007, by [PEDROSA Carmen N.](#) (Date first published: 3 September 2007).

It may sound absurd but the arrest of Jose Ma. Sison in Utrecht may be the breakthrough to allow a broad left to blossom politically. As some Philippine watchers have correctly analyzed, we need a genuinely left political grouping to have a viable parliamentary system with our own version of the Conservative and Labor parties in the UK. There are many who would otherwise sympathize with some of the positions taken by the broad Left on Philippine society and politics but are put off by Sison's doctrinaire policies and arrogant leadership. He continues to espouse long discredited Maoist strategies.

Indeed, it can be said it was Sison's hardheadedness that killed Romulo Kintanar and Arturo Tabara. Fellow communists say it was not so much the alleged crimes they committed or that they knew too much but because they dared defy the Utrecht command. Unfortunately, although there were many in the Left who know of this deadly internal ideological conflict two few were willing to risk coming out in the open. I don't know how the issue of this internal fratricide will be brought out in the Hague trial. This is the background conveniently ignored by human rights defenders on the issue of 'unexplained killings' which focused exclusively on the military and the Arroyo government.

Before the issue of extrajudicial killings hit the front pages, there were already sporadic leaks on the CPP's killing of Left activists revealed by other revolutionary and progressive movements. Although many felt threatened they hesitated to confront it. They were afraid of reprisals that would happen to their own members in far flung areas most of them unarmed. It is said Kintanar's killing was used to threaten former members of the party and Left organizations not belonging to the CPP "block" of the "Reaffirms".

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While the trial in the Hague will focus on the evidence against Sison, it's implications are more far-reaching than an assassination. Abroad, the CPP tried to justify this assassination by accusing Kintanar of having become a military agent. But in the Philippines, the official statements issued by the party leadership and the interviews given to the media by its spokesperson, Gregorio Rosal, did show that much more was at stake. Not only Kintanar had been first condemned to death as early as 1993, but also other former leaders of the CPP were again denounced as "traitors" and "counter-revolutionaries". The Communist Movement of the Philippines will also be on trial.

In this regard I would turn to the argument between Fidel Agcaoili, spokesman for Sison's Communist Party and Pierre Rousset who is a member of Europe Solidaire Sans Frontiers (ESSF), an international leftist solidarity movement. In his reply to Agcaoili, Rousset says it is necessary "to analyze the political fabric of the post-1992 CPP's assassination policy." Having been involved for many years in Asian solidarity movements he has the credentials to do so.

He says these recent killings confirm what we have said all along: "Romulo Kintanar's murder is part of a general trend and has to be understood in that framework. It represents a new and grave step in the post-1992 assassination policy of the CPP. With Kintanar, it was the first time that a legal, very

well known figure was killed right in Manila-Quezon City, the capital of the country. But with Florente Ocmén, it was the first time that an officer of Akbayan was murdered.

“Until now, various underground revolutionary organizations were targeted by the NPA assassination teams, but not Akbayan, a broad Left, “above ground”, legal party and electoral front. This has changed. “All components of the Left in the Philippines feel now under threat, including political parties and various mass movements which are ‘above ground’ and find it very difficult to protect themselves from a well armed group as the CPP-NPA,” Rousset writes. He says ten years after 1992, the CPP leadership’s policy of assassination escalated instead of fading away. He blames the split between the “reaffirmists” and “rejectionists.” “The reaffirmists stood for the Maoist strategy for a protracted people’s war of encircling the cities from the countryside. The rejectionists disagreed with this model and called for a strategy like the politico-military framework of the Vietnamese revolution.

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The CPP might appear ideologically monolithic but Rousset claims “behind this facade, a certain political pluralism grew from within, various regions exploring new ways of struggle. To put it simply: when a party and its ‘block’ (then called the National-Democrats, or NDs), embodies a whole generation of activists, its future ‘opens’. It can evolve in more than one direction. Now that the Filipino Left is plural, it is significant nevertheless that the majority of its present components come from the CPP and the National Democrats, together with some other original trends (coming from independent Marxists, Christian socialists or left Social Democrats sources).”

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. I am defending the right of a pluralist progressive and revolutionary Left to exist in the Philippines, Rousset adds.

The Bondoc Peninsula case is a good example on the differences 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. “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.

“There have been ups and downs, missed opportunities and bad failures in the leftist movements but 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. New debates have now begun, on strategies and programs, 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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\* From ABS-CBN Interactive: <http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/storypage.aspx?StoryId=90699>

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