

The Philippine Left

My Answer to Rainer Werning

Debate in "SOZ" (Germany)

Thursday 29 April 1999, by [ROUSSET Pierre](#) (Date first published: 29 April 2004).

Rainer Werning's published a sharp criticism of an interview concerning the formation of the Revolutionary Workers Party (RWP). We are looking for an English translation of Werning's article to post it on our website.

1. Rainer Werning's critique raises some interesting fundamental questions on the evolution of the Philippine Left. Its polemical nature is however surprising. The interview published in Soz had no pretensions of showing a total picture of the popular forces in the archipelago: it proposed to present a new organization of the Philippine Left. A press interview generally has a limited aim, for reasons of space.

The polemical tone of Rainer Werning is all the more surprising as he himself wrote a book-interview of Jose Maria Sison, *The Philippine Revolution. The Leader's View* (Crane Russak, 1989). Fully glorifying the CPP chairman, it does not enable the reader at all to understand the pluralism and the complexity of the Philippine Left - considering that the author had 240 pages at his disposal, and not just a few columns of a periodical!

2. Rainer Werning does not see what is "new" in the creation of the RWP. The founding of this organization dates however to 1998, which is quite recent and marks a long process of rethinking after the splits-expulsions in the CPP in 1992-1993, and this is substantially important.

In 1992-1993, the CPP leadership refused to call a congress and to organize a debate within the party, an occasion which would have allowed its militants to do an assessment. Instead, it carried on a process of rectification-expulsion. Under these conditions, the crisis of the party was manifested by a massive departure of individual activists, the dissidence of different central bodies and the breaking away of 3 important regions: Manila-Rizal (capital region), the Visayas (at the center of the archipelago), Central Mindanao (in the south). These former structures of the CPP contacted each other to discuss the possibilities of regrouping.

Six years afterwards, it should be possible to make a provisional assessment. The capital region of Manila-Rizal was the biggest in number, but it in turn entered into crisis. On the contrary, the Visayas and Central Mindanao regions were able to pursue the process of programmatic and political discussions to the end, concluding by an organizational fusion (several elements from Manila-Rizal participated in this process).

Since its constitution, the RWP has dynamically expanded. To my knowledge, it is indeed (and by far) the biggest regrouping of "dissident" forces stemming from the CPP crisis. The RWP is one of the

heirs (not the sole) of the national democratic movement, which represents the great Philippine revolutionary tradition of the 1970-1980 period. It has kept many of its features (including, it is true, a definition of the word fascism which is different from its original meaning in European history...) but it also made it evolve. It can be noted, for instance, that the RWP recognizes the right of tendencies and factions, and gives importance to internationalism to the point of showing interest in an International. The RWP did not become "Trotskyist" all of sudden. It continues and reactivates the national democratic tradition from within. This is one of its own contributions to the Philippine popular and revolutionary Left.

3. Rainer Werning is right in saying that one should also take fully into account the contribution of other currents, with whom I myself, by the way, have tied solidarity links since many years. Let us take a few examples (simplified): Bisig, constituted in 1985-1986, especially by elements not coming from the national democratic movement, introduced a "socialist vision" in the Philippines which is neither Stalinist nor Maoist. The "Pop-dems" (Popular Democrats), having precociously taken their distance from the CPP, developed innovative unitary practices. Marty Villalobos revived strategic analysis and reflexion. Ric Reyes furnished one of the keenest analysis on the paranoiac purges that cast a tragic shadow on the CPP. Akbayan is engaged in an interesting experience of building a unitary "electoral party". This pluralism of the Philippine progressive and revolutionary popular Left has contributed to its richness.

4. Because of its extreme gravity, the issue of the paranoiac purges during the second half of the 1980s should be dealt with to the core. Rainer Werning indicates certain lines of reflexion regarding the matter (the dynamics engendered by the militarization of society...) but does not bring up a fundamental point: the party as a whole is concerned by this tragedy and not only the island of Mindanao (where, by the way, central Mindanao was less affected compared to other regions). One of the most serious cases particularly concerns the Southern Tagalog region, a region highly supportive to Sison. Since then, certain sectors which left the CPP drew political lessons out of this traumatizing experience (including on the matter of the defense of human rights), while the Sison leadership has dealt with the matter only in a strictly fractional way.

5. How can one describe the CPP? I had much respect for this organization, which I started to get to know at the end of the 1970s. At the time, I never described it as "Stalinist-Maoist" I think that dynamic forces remain in this party, where the crisis is not yet ended: a new process of splits-expulsions occurred between 1995-1997, with the "Marxist-Leninists" breaking away. The tensions have been very sharp between the "presidential couple" (the Sisons who presently reside in the Netherlands) and the "vice-chair" (the Tiamzons who live in the guerrilla camps).

But, the CPP of today is not longer what it used to be. It has lost 4/5 of its forces compared to the time when it declared having 40,000 members. Behind an ideologically monolithic facade, it was rich in genuine political and regional pluralism - the "rectification" campaign in 1992-93 had precisely the objective of killing this internal pluralism and Joma Sison pushed bureaucratic leadership methods to extremes. In the past, the CPP used to be the center of all various mobilizations; today, it goes against all the other components of the popular Left. There have been more than one form of Maoism, and some were highly respectable. But, why can't we describe today the CPP as "Stalinist-Maoist"?

P.S.

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