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Philippines: Resist Authoritarian Tendencies within the Party! Let a Thousand schools of Thought Contend!

Comments on the Paper "Reaffirm our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors"

Wednesday 26 May 2021, by [Ka Barry](#) (Date first published: 1992).

Document; Ka (comrade) Barry underlines the responsibility of party leader Jose Maria Sison for factionalism and purges in the CPP and warns of a growing campaign to discredit and marginalise comrades in Central Mindanao.

The very first thing that needs to be clarified about the paper "Reaffirm Our Basic Principles and Rectify Errors" by Armando Liwanag [J.M. Sison] is whether the paper reflects the official position of the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) or just the personal opinion of the author. The author has every right to speak out like everyone else, but a distinction has to be clearly made between his personal views and the position of the Party or the Party leadership as a whole.

Last year, quite a number of important documents bearing the name of the CC were released and circulated, but only a few months after they came out, they were criticized by the Politburo and ordered withdrawn from circulation. The January-February 1991 issue of *Ang Bayan* is not the only document being referred to here but also the last two issues of *Rebolusyon* which featured the articles under question: "Lead the Masses, Launch the Offensives" and "Fulfill the Requirements of the Current Stage." (Significantly, comrades in international work have not been properly apprised of the latter.)

The release then subsequent withdrawal of the above documents is but an indication of the intensity of the disagreements within the Party leadership and the lack of unity on quite a number of major questions.

Now here comes another document bearing the name Armando Liwanag and the title Central Committee member of the CPP. Is the CC united on the views expressed in it? Or will it be withdrawn again after few months?

I just hope that the other members of the Politburo manage to get to read it before it is published by the mass media. In December 1989, other Politburo members first read (or read about) the 21st anniversary statement in The Manila Times. The part which discussed the international situation, which was one-third of the prepared draft, was eventually excised and the rest underwent major revisions before finally being approved by the CC.

Rectification or Vilification?

Liwanag's paper is supposed to be for a rectification campaign. What is this rectification campaign?

Is this the decision of the CC, the Politburo, the Executive Committee, or just the initiative of one person or a few individuals? Has the CC made an assessment or summing-up that can serve as the basis for the rectification?

Is the Party leadership united on what the problem really is, on what needs to be rectified? Judging from Liwanag's paper and the controversy that arose vis-à-vis Rebolusyon and Ang Bayan, there is no such unity. Is the problem insurrectionism and military adventurism as Liwanag claims? Or is it hardline positions, rigidity, fixation with outdated concepts, and the poverty of imagination and creativity?

Liwanag represents only one view within the CC; by now, it may not even be the dominant view, In all fairness, let the other side/s be heard too.

Liwanag hits out at so many Party units and individuals, hurling all sorts of accusations and using deplorable language. Is this rectification campaign or a vilification campaign?

Struggle between Old and New Ideas

It is basic Marxist-Leninist principle that all things change, that there is nothing absolute except change. Conditions in the material world change. So does ideas and concepts; old, outmoded ideas and concepts are replaced by new ones. This is a basic principle we all should reaffirm.

I believe that what the Party is now undergoing is essentially a struggle between old, outmoded ideas and concepts that are rapidly losing adherents and new ideas that, while still in the process of crystallizing, are fast gaining ground.

At a time when there is such a strong demand within the Party for change, it is surprising that Liwanag, in a most un-Marxist fashion, should now reject most, if not all, major changes, innovations, and proposed reforms made through the years, and insist on going back to old formulas under the guise of reaffirming "basic principles". The "back to the basics" call is a desperate and futile attempt to hang on to and preserve the old and prevent the new from taking fuller form and taking hold.

The struggle between old and new ideas has manifested itself in various questions: analysis of Philippine society, feminism, the environmental question, the role of the Party, et.al. But the sharpest expression is in two realms: revolutionary strategy and the socialist vision.

On Points Related to Strategy

On the realm of strategy, the struggle has been basically between those who wish to stick to the classical Mao-style "protracted people's war" as elaborated in the earliest Party documents and those who believe that major adjustments have to be made in the light of different conditions and changes in the Philippines and in the international scene.

The latter believe that the classical strategy is too rigidly fixated to attaining *military victory* through a protracted process stressing armed struggle in the countryside. Advocates of strategy changes fault this fixation for the inability of the movement to significantly move forward despite the crisis of governance of the Aquino regime. Instead, they advocate a type of people's war that is open to various possibilities — military victory, insurrectionary victory, political settlement, et.al. — and that pursues a more balanced development of military and political work, countryside and urban work, and domestic and international work.

Some of those pushing for major adjustments in strategy favor retaining many of the major features

of the classical model; others are calling for a general overhaul. There is yet no fully fleshed-out alternative.

In response to critics of the classical strategy, Liwanag now charges that “urban insurrectionism” and “military adventurism” have been the causes of the major setbacks of the Party over the last decade. The problem with these charges is that they are *not backed up by any summing-up of the CC*.

It is not at all surmising that given his detached physical circumstances, Liwanag can come up with analyses about the situation in the Philippines that are wide off the mark. Is it not just a short time ago that he came up with the analysis that there is a “revolutionary flow in the Philippines similar to that in 1983–86 (*Rebolusyon*, First Quarter 1991)? Now, he says that there is an “unprecedented decline in the mass base.”

It is muddleheadedness to equate urban insurrection with quick military victory. In the first place, urban insurrection relies mainly on the development of the mass movement and the political forces, rather than on the people’s army or the military forces. A military victory is practically the opposite of an insurrectionary victory.

Secondly, those who are open to an insurrectionary victory do not necessarily aim for quick victory. Insurrection is possible only when a revolutionary situation (refer to Lenin’s definition) has arisen. This revolutionary situation cannot be artificially created nor accurately predicted well in advance.

It is again muddleheadedness to collapse the question of so-called “military adventurism” (e.g., large military formations) and “urban insurrectionism” into one. There are those open to insurrectionary victory who believe that the buildup of the people’s army towards “regularization” is not incompatible with prospects for insurrection. But there are also those open to insurrectionary victory (like this writer) who do not believe that it is imperative to go into regular warfare to achieve victory. They maintain that a number of revolutions have been won mainly through insurrections without going through regular warfare.

If there has indeed been a premature build-up of military formations within the NPA, the blame should not be passed onto so-called “insurrectionists. It is the classical “protracted people’s war” model which should be blamed, for it stipulates that the people’s army must advance towards regular mobile warfare and even positional warfare. In pushing for regularization, the NPA command was in the main following the classical model, not “insurrectionism.”

If “regularization” failed, is it because it was premature? Or is it because of the classical model’s obsession with regular warfare?

Is it any surprise that after two long decades of guerrilla warfare, certain elements, in their earnestness to implement the classical model, should push for “regularization?”

A comprehensive critique of the classical model and proposed alternatives cannot be presented here due to time and space limitations. Various materials on the subjects, however, have already come out elsewhere. [\[1\]](#)

On the Mindanao Experience

In his paper, Liwanag has lashed out at various Party units and individuals, but he has reserved the greatest opprobrium for cadres from the Mindanao Commission of the early 80s. Is it just coincidence that the MindaCom, some of whose members have been, over the last few years, among the strongest critics of Liwanag’s positions on strategy and the socialist vision, is now being singled

out for attack?

Liwanag's differences with NNN regarding large military formations, with AAA regarding the Vietnamese "pol-mil" concept, with Edjop regarding "three strategic combinations," with JJJ regarding *Ang Bayan*, and with this writer regarding articles in a left journal are already well-known. Even the CIA knows about most, if not all, these differences. It so happens that all of them were from the old MindaCom.

Liwanag's attack against MindaCom cadres is once again irresponsibly made *without the benefit of a summing-up*, whether on the CC level or on the Mindanao Commission level. His account and analysis contain a lot of inaccuracies and very subjective remarks.

In 1989, after the Southern Tagalog fiasco, the Politburo called for a new summing-up of the anti-infiltration campaign in Mindanao, rejecting the earlier assessment that the campaign was essentially correct. CC members from the old MindaCom supported the resolution. This writer likewise supported it.

If Liwanag had sincerely wanted to get to the truth of what caused the Mindanao debacle of 1985-86, then he should have urged the CC to push through with the summing-up. Liwanag is certainly entitled to have his own opinions on the Mindanao experience, but in his position, he should not be bandying them about as if they were irrefutable truths.

In an attempt to bolster his conclusion that "urban insurrectionism" and "military adventurism" were the causes of the 1985-86 anti-DPA (deep penetration agent) hysteria, Liwanag has initiated his own "investigation," "interviewing" cadres from Mindanao regarding their experiences.

What is this? The whole thing is becoming surreal: conducting an "investigation" ten thousand miles away, fishing for evidence for a judgment already made, attacking cadres presumed guilty, etc. Is this an inquisition? Do we rectify a hysteria with another hysteria, a witchhunt with another witchhunt?

The anti-MindaCom campaign is unfair, vindictive, and divisive. It should be stopped.

This writer strongly disagrees with Liwanag's conclusions and ideological and political failings. This writer believes that most, if not all, of the old and new MindaCom members would disagree with Liwanag's judgment.

To settle the question, let a real and sober summing-up be organized and conducted.

On Points Related to the Question of Socialism

The debate on socialism has thus far mainly focused on the question of what caused the collapse of the "socialist" regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. There are those who take Liwanag's position that it was mainly due to "the evils of capitalism," the "restoration of capitalism," and "modern revisionism." But there are others who believe that it was due to a flawed model of socialism that was adopted in these countries. A significant number refer to this flawed model as the Stalinist model.

The "evils of capitalism" or "modern revisionism" theory is a position that has become more and more difficult to swallow. Despite the fact that Liwanag has written so much about it in the last two years, there are few takers. According to a well-known open mass leader in the Philippines, she still has to find a single Party member who agrees with the analysis regarding Eastern Europe as explained in "Lead the Masses."

Among international cadres, very few — possibly a little over a handful — actively promote and defend the “modern revisionism” theory. A significant number believe in the “flawed model” theory. The majority appears to be noncommittal. (To find out for sure, why not conduct an honest survey?) If Party cadres remain unconvinced, how can they possibly convince others? Even after over two years, neither the CC nor the Politburo has adopted the “evils of capitalism” theory despite Liwanag’s lobbying.

Now Liwanag seeks to have the repudiation of “modern revisionism” included as one of the “basic principles” of the Party, reminding people that it appeared in the earliest Party documents. But was it not he himself who forgot and deviated from his “basic principles” when he regarded the Soviet Union and the Eastern European states as socialist in the papers “On the International Relations of the Party” (1987) and “The World Situation and Our Line” (1988)? Why should he now talk about removing Party members who “deviate” from the “basic principles”?

A more detailed discussion regarding the “modern revisionism” and the “flawed model” theories will not be done here. There are enough materials available.

On the Dangers of Authoritarianism

For several years now, there has been a growing clamor for more democratic discussion and debates within the Party and within the movement as a whole. Many Party members have expressed the view that there are not enough forums within which to express one’s views and be truly heard; that many in the mass membership do not have much access to the pros and cons of the theoretical debates going on or are not even aware of the issues being debated; and that the writing of the theoretical papers has been limited to a very few.

Some Party members have thus taken various initiatives to promote more democratic discussions and debates.

Is it any coincidence that now, suddenly, when quite a number of Party cadres who are critical of Liwanag’s views have spoken out, he comes up with the assessment that the Party faces a grave problem of ultrademocracy?

The only grave problem of ultrademocracy that this writer knows of is the repeated practice of coming out with positions and statements in the name of the CC without the CC’s prior approval.

In line with the so-called “rectification campaign,” Liwanag calls for the removal from the Party of all “deviationists,” of all those who do not agree with his “basic principles.” This is obviously a call for a purge.

The call for a purge is a sign of desperation. It seems that when people cannot be convinced through democratic discussion and debate, extreme organizational measures are being conjured to resolve the issue.

A purge would have disastrous consequences on the Party and the revolutionary movement. It would divide the Party or cause large-scale resignations. It would discredit the Party to a lot of its national and international allies. Any attempts to conduct a purge should therefore be vigorously opposed and resisted.

The Party faces the threat of authoritarianism, a form of one-man rule that recognizes only one set of views — its own, that considers all others as “erroneous” or “muddleheaded,” and that brooks no criticism and uses extreme measures against those who criticize. Needless to say, any authoritarian tendencies should likewise be vigorously opposed and resisted.

Let a hundred flowers bloom, let a thousand schools of thought contend. Let there be full democratic discussion and debate where all Party members have access to the ins and outs of the issues and where they can participate actively. And after all these, let a new Party Congress finally resolve the important questions that need to be resolved. [2]

Armando Liwanag

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P.S.

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Footnotes

[1] See Omar Tupaz, "Toward a Revolutionary Strategy of the 90s," *Kasarinlan*, 7:2&3:58-89 — *Kasarinlan* editors

[2] This Party congress never occurred during or immediately after the Second Great Rectification campaign or the RA-RJ schism. The second Party congress would only be held in 2016, decades after both the campaign and the schism. — *Marxists Internet Archive*