

# Communist insurgency in the philippines history essay



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The idea of Communism has come a long way, since its early Marxist conception. In its very sense, Communism is concerned with the abolishment of the ruling class and the right to private property. Basically, it connotes social justice to everyone residing in a given territory. Social justice in this sense would mean that every constituent, regardless of the social strata to which they belong, would be treated with equal importance in terms of human rights and property and be given access to the resources that the state should provide to its people.

Communism in the Philippines is basically synonymous to the ideals and principles that classic Marxists uphold. The inequality between the ruling and working class paved the way for communism in the country to develop. Throughout the previous decades, advocators of the ideology (particularly the CPP-NPA-NDF) proliferated all over the island and have continued to uphold the belief that everyone inhabiting this country should be given equal opportunity to access resources that the country owns. They have continued their struggle of fighting the bureaucrat-capitalism, feudalism, imperialism, corruption, and other forms of social injustice that continue to haunt the country from the Pre-World War II era until the present time.

The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) indeed, made significant impacts in Philippine society. Although declared illegal by the government, the forces of the CPP nevertheless manifested itself in various parts of the archipelago. They have managed to resist the military forces which constantly work for their downfall over the years.

Why is this so? Why, in spite of the downfall of Soviet Union, communism in China, and many other socialist countries, the CPP managed to endure as a political organization? To answer these questions, this paper intends to enumerate the several factors that contributed to the emergence and persistence of communist insurgency in the country. From the original communist party, which is the PKP, this paper will discuss how it was re-established along with the internal and external crises that contributed to the present state of the movement. Furthermore, a brief discussion of the party's strategy of a protracted people's war, as well as the different counter-insurgency programs implemented by the government to combat the rebels will be presented. A thorough report of the facts behind the pervasive endurance of the Communist insurgents here in the Philippines will be explicated. Hence, this paper is timely as it could contribute to the shaping of public awareness and opinion regarding on a very substantial issue in the country.

The long-time struggle of the working class to achieve a society that will cater equality and justice among people who belong to various socio-economic strata has resulted to the formation of revolutionary movements (Dela Cruz, 2006). Even before the Philippines managed to achieve its independence from foreign colonizers, communist insurgency has started. According to Cusi (1996), the Communist insurgency in the Philippines had its early beginnings when a number of supporters of Tan Malaca, an Indonesian Communist leader, started to recruit and organize members during the early 20's. The recruited members, most of them labourers, were then formally set up on August 26, 1930 as the Partido Komunista ng

Pilipinas (PKP, Philippine Communist Party) at the Templo del Trabajo which was then the most important place of gathering for the labor elements of the city during the early 30's. With its original 60 members, it was then officially proclaimed as the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) by Crisanto Evangelista on November 7, 1930 at the Plaza Moriones, Tondo which is known to be the center of the working-class district of Manila (Saulo, 1990).

The establishment of the PKP as a genuine party of the working-class has aimed to uphold the unfinished revolution of Andres Bonifacio, the Great Plebeian. Though Bonifacio's struggle is more of the anti-colonial type of revolution, his example was seen by the PKP as the Proletarian hero for them to advocate their struggle of class equality through armed revolution.

According to Jose Lava, former general secretary of the party, the PKP will serve as the workers' instrument of upholding their rights against the exploitative tendencies of the bourgeoisie. Through the movement, it will be easier for the working class to make their sentiments known aside from the fact that they comprise the class with the highest percentage in the society. It is but proper to create a group that will promote the welfare of the class that sustains the other members of the society (Saulo, 1990).

During the 26th day of December 1968 however, a group of disgruntled young members of the PKP led by Jose Maria Sison re-established a Marxism-Leninism-Maoist leaning CPP in a small barrio somewhere in Pangasinan. Sison, who was then a student of the University of the Philippines, criticized the leadership of the Lava brothers whom he blamed when the Huks were defeated during the 1950s. He was expelled from the PKP then took the

leadership of re-establishing the Communist Party of the Philippines together with 90 other cadres (Gutierrez, 2001).

On the other hand, some Red fighters and Commanders of the dwindling people's liberation army along the countryside of Central Luzon also loss confidence with the way their leaders are acting. Due to greediness and corruption, the army became inhumane and anti-people. Bernabe Bucayno (Commander Dante), together with his group of peasant guerrillas, then decided to go to Manila to seek for the group of Sison who was then beginning to strengthen the re-established CPP. Together with this group of young students and professionals, Commander Dante founded and became the Commander-in-chief of the New People's Army (NPA) which became the armed wing of the Communist Party. The decision of coming up with a new military group transpired from the need of an armed force that will pursue the proletariat war in the Philippines (Cusi, 1996).

On April 24, 1973, the CPP-NPA established its legal front - the National Democratic Front (NDF). NDF is an alliance of 15 underground democratic mass organizations led by the CPP that aims to wage a " national democratic revolution" that will uphold the goal of achieving a socialist state. The establishment of the NDF, along with its 10 point program, is a manifestation of the CPP's formal declaration of war against the Philippine government. Its connections with the different sectors of society including the religious, teachers (ACT), farmers (KMP), students (LFS), and the labor sector (KMU) helped the CPP a lot on its goal of expanding its influence and power primarily through winning the " hearts and minds" of the masses (Ferrer & Raquiza, 1993; Cusi, 1996).

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Meanwhile, Sison was captured by the military in 1977 a year after Commander Dante was captured in 1976. However, the capture of the two leaders did not encumber the continuous growth of the CPP-NPA. Its strength grew exponentially throughout the years and reached its peak in 1987 with 25, 200 members and 15, 500 firearms (Adriatico, 2000). Up until the present time, the party continues to grow and manages to endure the numerous counterinsurgency programs implemented by the different administrations from Marcos until Arroyo.

In further analyzing the persistence of the CPP-NPA and the implications that it may bring to the Philippine society, it is necessary to outline the different crises that lead to the restructuring of the original communist party as well as the effects of the faction groups that occurred within the party. These factors being mentioned are vital in this study for they have contributed to the overall objectives and present structure of the movement as well. The internal crises are indeed significant to the continued existence of the insurgents for it helped the members of the movement learn from previous mistakes as well as in determining their goal of accomplishing a protracted people's war.

The main problems that occurred and that caused great division among the members of the party might be traced back to its founding roots. In 1968, a document was published by the Congress of Re-establishment of the Communist Party of the Philippines wherein the main errors and weaknesses of the Party were enumerated. In this document entitled " Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party", the four drawbacks of the Party, namely: 1) ideological weaknesses; 2) political errors; 3) military errors; and 4) organizational

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errors, were enumerated and discussed thoroughly how it affected the insurgents' struggle.

Subjectivism on the previous leader's ideologies has caused a great trouble on the original communist party's goals and objectives. Because most of the leaders and members came from affluent clans, they carried with them their primary bourgeois ideas. The party's leaders relied on the subjectivist and opportunist idea of competing or cooperating with the bourgeois parties and groups in the city as a means of achieving socialism. The party became "incorrectly city-based and city-oriented" that they have neglected the revolutionary initiative and force of the peasants located along the countryside. Furthermore Sison, as cited by Dela Cruz, said that the failure of the original party to come up with a definite strategy that will serve a "revolutionary and thoroughgoing proletarian world outlook" has led to the party's paralyzation once the US Imperialists and running dogs came into the Philippine picture (Dela Cruz, 2006 ; CPP 1968).

Aside from subjectivism in ideology, political errors that have been committed also affected the insurgents' progression. Political errors, in this sense, refer to the right opportunism and "left" opportunism that the party leaders have committed. Instead of pursuing their aspiration to abolish differences in social strata, the party leaders became opportunistic in the sense that they pushed for subordination of the working-class movement to their enemies by surrendering to them totally through peaceful agreements and compromise. Moreover, rejecting the idea of a socialist revolution and bringing up the concept of "class cooperation" was advocated by the leaders. This led to further discrepancies on what does the communist party  
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really advocate. The Party suffered from political disasters because it maintained its “urban, parliamentary, and open character” and failed to arouse and mobilize the peasants in the rural areas to coordinate with them as a main force for the revolution. Emanating from the subjectivist world outlook, the leaders of the party became consumed with the idea of being regarded as “Left” opportunists by the bourgeoisie and failed to enact their illegal activities simultaneously with the legal ones. Furthermore, the party leaders became corrupt and greedy resulting to the loss of confidence of other members and also the masses as well (Weekley, 2001).

Another flaw that caused the downfall of the first communist party is military error. The party leaders failed to assimilate an armed struggle, agrarian revolution, and rural base-building in the countryside, of which according to Maoist thought are the three crucial and indispensable components in waging a people’s war (Mercado, 1989; CPP, 1968). According to Adriatico (2000), the absence of an armed struggle alone has a big impact on their failure because arms, supposedly, will serve as their main weapon towards a democratic revolution. Their failure to established one crippled the movement when US Imperialists and Japanese troops colonized the land.

One more lapse that the party has suffered is the weakness of its organization. According to Sison, “the main [organizational] disability of the Communist Party of the Philippines has been its failure to build up an organization that has a broad mass character and that is national in scale”.

This means that the party was not able to expand thoroughly in number.

They were not able to recruit members all over the archipelago that could

have helped them in the planned revolutionary war. The party did not able to  
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mobilize other groups belonging to the working class which could have added a significant number to their force (CPP, 1968).

The four main errors and weaknesses that led to the re-establishment of the first communist party in the Philippines have been briefly discussed above. These drawbacks have served as lessons to the members of the reformed communist party - the CPP-NPA. However, the CPP-NPA is still facing a lot of crises within the boundaries of its sphere. Throughout the years of their existence, there still exist a number of difficulties that challenged their persistence as a party that will uphold the welfare of the working-class and peasants.

In an interview with Professor Benjamin Mangubat, a History professor of the University of the Philippines Manila, he said that the CPP-NPA-NDF insurgents have experienced factions within the movement some time during 1990s. The two main groups include the Re-affirmists and the Rejectionists. The Reaffirmists, from the term itself, affirm the basic principles of Maoism-Leninism-Marxism thought of an armed struggle in order to achieve the main goal of a classless the society. The group asserts the need of coercive power towards the strategy of a protracted people's war..

On the other hand, the Rejectionists are the ones who abandon the need for an armed struggle. They also reject Sison's view of the Philippine society as a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country. Furthermore, they have also retracted Mao's thesis of anti-revisionism as well as the idea of a people's democratic leadership. For this group, achieving a socialist-communism like that in the Soviet Union is not possible. They have given up on the idea of

democratic revolution but instead focused themselves in improving the elite democracy that the Philippine society has been experiencing for the past and present regimes. Elite democracy, like that in the Philippines is not a true democracy. It is a democracy in the most superficial level because it is the rule of very few powerful and affluent political clans, more like aristocracy as such. Essentially, the Rejectionists goal is to change the power relations prevailing in the society through “ counter-hegemony” by the means of ideological state apparatuses. These include educational discussions, basic mass integrations and organic intellectuals who stay in rural areas to teach the masses regarding the current situation of Philippine society. Like the Reaffirmists, the Rejectionists also want change in the Philippine society. But as to what that change is, and how it would be attained, there remains not only the question, but a divide.

The number of internal crises that transpired within the old and new communist party has been concisely discussed above. These problems have indeed affected the insurgents’ organization as well as their dynamism as a group. The fragmentation of the movement into two factions with contrasting beliefs has brought out the ideological discrepancies and weaknesses among the members which in turn crippled the overall undertakings of the party as well as the weakening of their political hold in the Philippines.

However, some notable positive consequences arouse from the split. Dr. Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, former head of NDF and a Rejectionist himself, enumerated several benefits of this split. In an interview conducted by Emere Distor of the online publication Kasama, Quimpo said that “ the most positive consequence has been the emergence of a more pluralist Left and <https://assignbuster.com/communist-insurgency-in-the-philippines-history-essay/>

there's no more hegemony on the part of the Communist Party of the Philippines-National Democratic Front-New People's Army (CPP-NDF-NPA). We have a Left which is now more plural." This pluralism had produced many other small groups that are relatively stronger and influential in certain sectors compared to the monopolized Left by the CPP before. The groups Bukluran ng Manggagawang Pilipino (BMP) and the Alliance of Progressive Labor (APL) of the labour sector for example, has contested the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU). Moreover, the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), a peasant group aligned with the CPP, is also challenged by other bigger peasant organizations. With these situations of the different sectors of the working-class, the pluralized Left could act in a strategically specific manner of upholding their privileges as marginalized sectors thereby creating greater possibilities of being heard by the government.

Aside from the pluralism of the Left, the disintegration of the Communist Party became the key for them to rectify, look back and learn from their previous errors in order to build a stronger party that will cater to the goal of every member.

At this point, the different events that happened within the internal affairs of the CPP-NPA have been discussed thoroughly by the researcher. The crises and struggles that contributed to the re-establishment of the communist party as well as the fragmentation and clash of ideologies along with its adverse and favourable consequences have been briefly explicated. Now, this paper will address the external factors that contributed to the persistence of the communist insurgents in the Philippines.

According to Dela Cruz (2006), there are three main factors that contributed to the persistence of the communist insurgents in the country. These three include the political, economic and social factors directly or indirectly observed in the Philippine society. From the CPP's perspective, these three factors are seen as the root cause of the widespread exploitation of the working class. Jose Maria Sison's view of the Philippine society as "semi-colonial and semi-feudal" depicted his purpose of leading the working class towards a struggle that will benefit the majority of people being exploited by the upper-middle class.

The political factors, basically, refer to the unequal distribution of power in the country. The existence of an abusive ruling class, who only comprise a very minimal percentage of the country's population, has paved the way for severe oppression of the working class. These political factors composed of semi-colonialism, imperialism and bureaucrat capitalism. Semi-colonialism and imperialism refers to the indirect control of the United States to Philippine affairs. Though nominally declared as independent on the 4th of July 1946, the shadow of the US imperialists have still remained within the structures of the country haunting every powerless Filipino. Even if these foreign entities do not exist physically in the land, their power is implicitly felt by the workers and peasants through the traditional politicians, elites and the comprador big bourgeoisies (Rocamora, 1994). Bureaucrat capitalism on the other hand is the use of public office as an instrument of acquiring private assets and land. The concept mirrors those traditional politicians who make use of their position for business opportunities in order for them to increase personal profit and capital. Basically, it is a form of graft

and corruption in the sense that these politicians use public funds, which is supposedly for public services, for their own self-interest setting aside the welfare of the poor people who are in need (Dela Cruz, 2006).

Aside from the political factors mentioned above, another aspect that contributed to the continued persistence of the CPP-NPA are the economic factors which include semi-feudalism, sham land reforms, unemployment and foreign monopoly capitalism. The concept of semi-feudalism has been defined by Sison as “ an economic term that refers to an economy whose internal forces of production are mainly and essentially agrarian and pre-industrial, and whose relations of production are dominated by the combination of the comprador big bourgeoisie in the cities and the landlord class in the countryside” (Dela Cruz, 2006). This condition of the Philippine society has made the life of the Filipino masses, particularly the peasant workers who till hectares of land in exchange of a very low wage, a miserable one. The landlords and business elites become richer while the peasant farmers stay poor without even experiencing a secured and stable life. In connection to this are sham land reforms which are pretentious modification of existing land laws. These land reforms are formulated to deceive the farmers but in reality, these will just give more benefit to the landed elites once implemented. Furthermore, the widespread unemployment and the inability of the government to provide basic social services are also some of the factors that provoked the persistence of the insurgents. In addition, foreign monopoly capitalism, which refers to the “ dominance of foreign monopolies in capitalist economies”, made use of the

Philippines as a source of cheap raw materials and as a free market where they can dump all surplus products at a very low price.

Another factor that should be considered in answering the question why do the communist insurgents continue to persist is the social factors. In this aspect, the existence of social inequality, injustice, poverty and deprivation in the society are being regarded as a critical contributor to the existence of revolutionary movements. Social injustice and inequality refers to the unequal distribution of resources and services, to delayed administration of justice, and greed for power and wealth that lead to violation of human rights. Furthermore, it includes the inefficiency of the government bureaucracy to implement laws that will protect the environment and will cater to the needs of the marginalized and indigenous cultural communities. Moreover, the lack of respect and recognition to ancestral domains as well as to indigenous cultural and political systems are also included here (Cusi, 1996). In a society where tremendous changes and advancement of technology is highly observable and practiced, tremendous exploitation of indigenous beliefs and ethnic practices is highly probable to occur. Such as in the case of the Philippines, the long-time experience of foreign colonial rule has been a big influence to our adherence to a Westernized type of culture leading us in patterning our own system of rules and beliefs to theirs. This in turn has caused the downfall of our native practices and the exploitation of indigenous people's rights by the elites who are Filipinos themselves. Many rural places have been neglected by the national and local governments. Many people suffer from deprivation of basic services such as education and health. With these reasons, many Filipinos living in the

countryside cannot surface themselves from the deepening roots of poverty for they do not have any alternative and choice.

With the number of factors being mentioned above, the emergence and continued existence of the CPP-NPA insurgents is likely to occur. What other means is possible in order for the working class to be heard by this unjust society? For the party, no other way is effective enough but to form a revolutionary movement. The dream of the insurgents to achieve a classless society - where people are equal, where people are given respect and dignity, where there is no foreign intervention, where people are able to achieve their highest possible esteem as a human being, where people are treated with reverence and exploitation is definitely out of the picture - has motivated them to continue the struggle that they have been fighting for the past decades. In spite of the numerous crises that the party has been through, they have managed to continue their fight for a democratic revolution. With this, it is but necessary to enumerate and explain the strategies that the CPP-NPA has done throughout the years of their fight for a protracted people's war.

The overall objective of the communist insurgency movement is to overthrow the semi-colonial and semi-feudal system prevailing in the country. Apparently, the primary means seen by the party towards achieving such goal is through a democratic revolution. Sison (1971), as cited by Saulo, followed Mao Tse Tung's idea that a democratic revolution will only be successful through the involvement of three primary organizations namely:

1. a party that will provide the brain and overall leadership (CPP);
2. an army that will serve as the military force during armed encounters (NPA);
- and 3. a

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united front that will extend political influence, support and that will mobilize the masses (NDF).

Weekley (2001) mentioned the primary strategy of the CPP-NPA-NDF which is composed of two major categories: 1. general strategies pertaining to the protracted war as a whole, and 2. particular or tactical strategies pertaining to individual counter campaigns covering a specific base area.

The protracted armed struggle is the primary means of the movement to offset the government force, particularly the military which have the advantage of monopoly over firearm resources. This is done through conducting limited armed conflicts with the government troops in different localities, mostly mountainous area chosen by the insurgents themselves to ensure victory (Cusi, 1996; Kintanar, 1999).

According to Weekley (2001), the strategy of a protracted people's war involves 3 stages namely strategic defensive, strategic stalemate and strategic offensive. The initial strategy in conducting the protracted war starts at the countryside wherein the NPA forces try to establish as many rural bases as possible. They try to encircle the rural areas, where bulk of the peasant farmers and workers reside, so that they would be able to recruit more members that will strengthen their force. This strategy stemmed from the idea that people in remote areas are more vulnerable to radical thoughts and revolutionary ideas since most people living in there are poor and exploited because they can hardly feel the presence of government programs (Hoeksema, 1990).



The strategic defensive stage is the critical part of “ party building, army building, base building and united front organizing”. In this stage, the NPA initiates offensive steps by provoking the military troops to an armed encounter for the purpose of accumulating firearms and also to show the population that they have the capability of engaging in a war, to boost self-confidence and build up support perhaps. Also included in this stage is the strategy of conducting militant mass actions in urban centers simultaneously with the initiation of larger scale tactical offensiveness launched in the countryside (Cusi, 1996; Weekley, 2001). The strategic defensive stage basically aims to destabilize the military forces so that the insurgents could easily penetrate and mobilize the masses.

On the other hand, the strategic stalemate stage is reached when the NPA forces reach parity with that of the military group. The NPA launch offensive operations in the form of ambush, attacks on AFP installations or captures of town halls. At this point, the NPA aims to match the manpower of the AFP since their attention is subdivided into the different disorders occurring all over the country (Cusi, 1996; Saulo, 1990). Finally, in the strategic offensive stage, the NPA conduct simultaneous military offensive techniques accompanied by general strikes, massive demonstrations, and sabotage activities in major cities while the AFP is on the defensive side trying to protect the towns, cities and major military installations.

Aside from the general strategy of conducting a protracted people’s war, another one include those particular or tactical strategies pertaining to individual counter campaigns covering a specific base area. The members that are assigned to different areas carry the responsibility of enticing the

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people to join the movement. In this technique, cadres (mostly college graduates) educate the people about the prevailing system as well as the social injustices and inequality that are occurring in the country (Cusi, 1996).

At this point, the researcher has already presented the different strategies that the CPP-NPA has done to achieve their main objective of a socialist society. The CPP-NPA's side has been thoroughly discussed in the above sections. How they manage to persist and continue their struggle up until the present time has always depended on the type of society that the Philippines adapt. Looking at the other side, the government on the other hand did not remain as mere passive observers of the insurgents' existence. Using the AFP as the primary machinery, the government has been trying its best to combat the party through the conduct of counter-insurgency (COIN) measures (Ferrer & Raquiza, 1993).

The dictatorial regime of Ferdinand Marcos is the first administration to initiate counter-insurgency programs through security and development. Security, in this sense, refers to the efforts of the military to destroy the insurgents through clearing, mopping-up, and ranger-type operations. Because Marcos considered the insurgents as a threat to his regime, he used the iron hand technique in destroying the insurgents' spreading forces. Development, on the other hand, refers to the measures implemented by Marcos which primarily addressed the root causes of insurgency. He strengthened the economic and socio-political structure of the society through programs that catered to development. The Republic Act 1700 or commonly known as the Anti-Subversion Law was implemented. Through this law, all communists, even those who are just suspected by the military, were

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put into prison. The Oplan Katatagan was another program implemented by Marcos that addressed belligerency primarily through gaining the support of the people against the insurgents. However, the program failed because of military abuses thus paving the way for insurgency to grow extensively (Rocamora, 1994).

After the martial rule of Marcos, the new set of AFP under the Aquino administration assessed the previous regime's strategy of combating insurgency. Hence, the Oplan Mamamayan counter-insurgency program was carried out. Under the said program, civilian volunteer organizations, territorial forces consisting of the PNP and paramilitary forces, and the mobile forces of the AFP were combined to form the " Three-Tiered Defense System" against the CPP-NPA (Cusi, 1996). According to Adriatico (2000), the joined forces of the three would have been effective if not again for the abuses of the AFP. In addition to the Oplan Mamamayan, the National Ceasefire Committee (NCC) was established and several ceasefire agreements between the insurgents and government have been tried to enact but apparently failed due to the instability of the AFP during those times (Ferrer & Raquiza, 1993).

The Ramos administration went one step farther in achieving peace and stability in the countryside. He debunked Marcos' Anti-Subversion Law and released amnesty proclamations to the alleged rebels imprisoned during Marcos' regime. The National Unification Commission (NUC) was formed whose task is to investigate all concerned sectors and then recommend probable peace negotiations to the Office of the President (Ferrer & Raquiza,

1993). However, Ramos was not able to destroy the forces of the CPP-NPA due to a variety of reasons.

The failure of the different regimes to address the problems of insurgency has added to the strength of the CPP-NPA. The insurgency continued to prevail along the remote areas adding more desperation to the AFP. In this light, the AFP came to the point of spreading black propaganda techniques against the party. But still, the CPP-NPA was able to counter those techniques and is still managing to continue their struggle for a socialist society (Dela Cruz, 2006).

More than just a threat to national security, the emergence and continued persistence of the said organization could lead to other problems that may be more difficult to address if the government will not initiate genuine reforms.

The persistence of the CPP-NPA i