

The revolutionaries and the masses of the Philippines must rely on their own strength

This exclusive interview with Jose Maria Sison, Chief Political Consultant of the NDFP (National Democratic Front of the Philippines) and founding chairman of the CPP (Communist Party of the Philippines) was made in the beginning of July by Gabi Fechtner, Party Chairman of the MLPD, for the Red Flag. Jose Maria Sison will also participate as one of the keynote speakers at the international seminar on the 100th anniversary of the October Revolution in October in Germany.

Gabi Fechtner: Dear Jose Maria Sison, we are very glad that we can make this interview for the Red Flag Magazine with you because.

Our first question is: How is the development under the new President Duterte to be assessed and how is the population in the Philippines?

Jose Maria Sison: President Duterte is "unique" to the Philippines in that, before he took over the presidency of the Philippines, he explicitly referred to himself as Left. That he was a socialist, not a communist. He said he wanted to uphold the sovereignty of the Philippines, build the economy, promote land reform and industrialization. And that he wanted to pursue an independent foreign policy. It was the first time a new president made such announcements.

But we still do not know how he would withstand the pressure of the ruling government system. He stands before a government in which there is a mixture of some left cabinet members, but mostly right-wing. This is especially true in key positions in the field of security, such as the Department of National Defense, the Department of the Interior or the National Security Adviser. These belong to the right-wing and pro-USA poles. How Duterte can cope with this will be shown.

He has announced that he wants to make an independent foreign policy to use funds from China and Russia - but he also wants funds from the old allies - USA, Japan, and Western Europe.

The crisis in the Philippines is so deepgoing that he has to think seriously about a great many questions. First of all, things have been very simplified in order to win the elections. He said he would "kill" those involved in the illegal drug trade and wage war against drugs. These were his words and today he will have to learn to clear up his expression. He has promised to eradicate drugs, crime and corruption in the government.

In the fight against drugs, there are already extrajudicial killings (people shot in the street), and he has publicly encouraged the police to kill suspects if they resist. There is a reward system, a quota system for the police units, depending on how many heads they deliver. The police have already murdered thousands. This is a public scandal, both nationally and internationally.

He has promised reforms and has won approval. This is a point which speaks in his favor: He has opened the possibility for reforms.

On the other hand there are increasing indications from commentators as to whether there has already been a silent coup in the background.

The resources of the Philippines are not enough to stabilize the country economically. In addition, foreign borrowings must be sought to augment the country's revenue, including the income of the Filipino workers working abroad.

I can not guarantee that Duterte will be able to honor his promises. The revolutionaries and the broad masses of the people must rely on their own strength, on the strength of the masses, for mass struggles to achieve the best for them.

Duterte made it a special concern to begin negotiations on peace with the NDFP. But these negotiations are not without obstacles. There have been several intermittent interruptions in the negotiations. But the negotiations go on in principle.

An important point is that all agreements made so far in the first round of formal talks remain valid. This means that the agreements on immunity and safety guarantees or the absence of prosecution continue to apply. This is intended to protect negotiators and their consultants on both sides. That is, the NDFP consultants who are going back to the negotiations to the Philippines can remain active and have the guarantee that they are protected there and not to be arrested. Nineteen among them are out on bail, based on the promise made by Duterte, that they would be released with many others under an amnesty. His amnesty promise, however, Duterte has not fully fulfilled. It has to be said that the NDFP - to put it cautiously - is annoyed that he has not kept his promise. But it is important that the negotiations go on, that negotiations on social, economic and political reforms have begun, and the review of an existing agreement on the respect of human rights and international humanitarian law.

Duterte lives with the risk that different political forces oppose him. We are currently experiencing the spike of armed conflict in Marawi. The Maute group and Abu-Sayaff groups are involved. They are associated with Islamic State/Daesh, known to be the creation of the CIA. This is financed by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

But the larger opposing forces will come from other reactionary forces. Duterte spoke of the danger that the CIA would initiate his assassination or a coup against him. He fears that.

My opinion is that the danger that threatens him from the US is currently rather low. The US appears to have difficulties cleaning up the act of Duterte. But we have only heard his words so far that he wants to be independent from the USA. He has talked a lot about what he wants to do. In fact, however, he has gone into merely symbolic acts. And the Left says this is not enough. But, the Left still gives him a chance, especially the NDFP, to negotiate a peace.

Gabi Fichtner: How is the role of CPP in the Philippines developing in this situation? What role does it play in this development?

Jose Maria Sison: The CPP, the revolutionary forces and the masses have to carry out their basic tasks, with or without Duterte. There are revolutionary tasks that need to be carried out,

such as the struggle for national independence, promote people's democracy, realize development and so on. But, of course, these forces cannot undertake national industrialization by themselves, before they can control over the ports and cities. But there are economic initiatives that can be developed by the revolutionary movement. It can advance the peace negotiations so that national industrialization is agreed upon. It is good if certain socio-economic arrangements can be achieved within the framework of the peace negotiations.

There are also bourgeois-democratic reforms, such as land reform, and this is necessary to develop the economy. And then, of course, in connection with national industrialization or the Filipinization of the economy. This is not a socialization of the ownership of the means of production, which is still mainly in the hands of the private sector, but it is about giving way to the rights of Filipino entrepreneurs and the Philippine state giving priority to Filipino entrepreneurs over the foreign monopoly capitalists.

Let me classify the various forms of struggle.

First, it is perfectly legitimate for the people and the revolutionary forces to wage people's war or to conduct revolutionary armed struggle. This is the highest form of struggle because it answers the central question of revolution, the conquest of political power. And with political power, you can carry out all the social reforms, in all its various aspects.

Second is the legal mass movement. This can consist of protests, petitions, etc. These are legal, unarmed activities and these mass actions can be carried out at any time and on any question.

The third is the struggle in bourgeois elections. The Communist Party is always careful not to interfere with these legal campaigns and their progressive actors. There are patriotic, progressive, left-wing parties.

And then there are the peace negotiations as fourth. This is also a form of struggle. A peace agreement can come about, but it can only be a stepping stone to the ultimate victory. You have to be very vigilant, so that the movement does not suffer a defeat. The other side is working with concepts that are meant to make you accept the power of imperialist relations. There are ways to push you into a position of surrender and to subject you to pacification.

Then the fifth kind of struggle: If you are arrested as a suspected revolutionary, or even if you are accused of common crimes, you must also fight this in court. The Communists must also go to court. When you are in prison, the enemy controls your body. There you have to make the most of your legal possibilities. There are many ways to stand before a bourgeois court and to resist. There are a variety of ways to contribute something to the revolutionary struggle.

As a revolutionary, you must show that you stand for principles and stand by your responsibility to serve the interests of the people. But you can also be an accused who does not say anything and who lets his lawyer speak. The prosecution submits "evidence", and then it is up to the lawyer to prove the falsity of these "proofs". This is also a form of struggle.

Gabi Fechtner: What role does party building play?

Jose Maria Sison: We must build the revolutionary party, the proletarian party, because this party stands for the most progressive and most productive political force. It has the comprehensive theory and practice of how to carry out the social revolution.

If you build the revolutionary party of the proletariat, you must answer the question about what kind of revolution you are doing. Whether you want to recycle the old democratic revolution, like in the nineteenth century, whether you want to go back to these experiences. Or let us try to carry through a new kind of democratic revolution led by the proletariat. One thing is certain: If you declare that you want to carry out a democratic revolution of the new type led by the working class, then the party is the key for this revolution to be carried forward to socialism. For in this era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution, you can not carry out a bourgeois-democratic revolution, which as such can exist independently. If the proletariat is dispensed with, there will be recessions and regressions, and no further progress to socialism.

If you build a revolutionary party of the proletariat, you must assume what proletarian revolutionary leadership means. This means that the class leading the revolution has the capacity to bring about socialism, upon the basic completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Take land reform, for example. Land reform is an anti-feudal measure. In history it was carried out in bourgeois revolutions. But if the proletariat has the leadership, you will first distribute the land titles of ownership to the peasants. This means that you are creating a whole lot of petit owners. Under the leadership of the working class, however, cooperatives are built up immediately. Cooperatives of people who would otherwise be independent individual owners and producers. But this is the beginning of socialization of land.

And if you reinforce industrialization, the surplus rural population can get industrial jobs. And so you have fewer and fewer people on the farms. The most effective method would be to create state farms. In China, for example, there were three ascending stages of cooperatives, up to the level of people's communes. Or the collectives in the Soviet experience, etc.

The working class and its connection with the party are, in any case, the key. The working class can bring about the continuation of the new democratic revolution and its transformation into the socialist revolution.

There are two stages which must be distinguished. You cannot undertake the socialist revolution directly in a country like the Philippines, which is semi-feudal and semi-colonial. Here you can not reach socialism directly. First, you must defeat imperialism, the local reactionary classes, the compradors, and the landowners by winning the new-democratic revolution. Here you need the People's War. To realize socialism is indeed the more peaceful part of the process when you have already taken over the power. You only have to be on your guard against the few counterrevolutionaries.

Gabi Fechtner: We would still be interested to know something about the Second CPP Congress. We've heard that you've successfully done it. What can you tell?

Jose Maria Sison: Indeed, the Second Congress took place, according to reports that I have come to know. Prior to this, there were plenary conferences of the Central Committee which had the weight of several congresses.

It is significant that after such a long time an actual congress could be held with hundreds of delegates, a truly comprehensive congress. In this case, there were 200 delegates, surrounded by battalions of NPA fighters who protected them. The process of conducting this second congress lasted several months. Since the documents were prepared, there were frequent large meetings. Delegates worked through the documents, without necessarily being present in the congress itself.

Because the character of the Philippine society is still that of a semi-feudal, semi-colonial country, there are no radical changes in the program. But there are certain improvements that will adapt the program to current facts and circumstances. For example: When the first congress was held, there were US military bases in the Philippines. Subsequently, after the removal of the US military bases, there would be agreements allowing the US to go anywhere in the Philippines and to rotate their troops on Philippine territory. This had to be included in the new program. But we can no longer speak of US military bases but US forward stations within Philippine military camps.

There were other changes. Thus, the program shows that there have already been various so-called but ineffective land reform programs. These have been fraudulent, they did not solve the land problem.

So there are already important revisions of the program and constitution of the CPP. I spoke of 200 delegates, but more than 200 participated, through the meetings that took place before the actual congress. The whole party has participated in drafting and developing the documents.

There were selected delegates who did not attend the congress as a matter of precaution against the possibility of the enemy attacking the congress. You have to be prepared for such a thing and ensure that delegates are not victims of a massacre by the enemy. There are instances in history that entire parties have disappeared because all the leaders responsible were at a single gathering and were massacred. In times of danger, make sure that there are members of the Central Committee and delegates of the party congress who can live on and continue the life and development of the party.

The congress also ensured that there was a good distribution among the members of the Central Committee in terms of age. Highly experienced senior, middle-aged and young cadres are well represented. The CPP has made sure that young and middle-aged members of the Central Committee are in the majority. The cadres who are still robust, robust to lead the struggle of the people (peoples struggle), form a majority. In the revolution, the commanders at all levels must be young. If you have too many commanders who are already 50 years old, if the army has already grown old, it is not so effective, not so agile.

If I refer to the example of the revolution of 1896, the revolutionary generals were in their twenties. The generals of the enemy army were in their fifties.

Gabi Fechtner: We congratulate you heartily on this successful congress under these difficult conditions and thank you very much for the interview.
And we wish you all the best for your further revolutionary work.

Jose Maria Sison: I thank you for your good wishes. All concerned in the Philippines will receive your congratulations and best wishes. You can be sure that the Communist Party of the Philippines will try to become stronger and realize its revolutionary tasks for the benefit of the people. The Philippine revolution will advance under the leadership of the working class.