

FIGHT BACK! NEWS interview with
Jose Maria Sison
on the People's War
in the Philippines



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Fight Back! News editor Mick Kelly with Jose Maria Sison

Fight Back! interviewed Jose Maria Sison, the founding Chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines, August 19, 2017 in Utrecht, the Netherlands. The interview ran in three parts on fightbacknews.org. All three parts are reprinted in this pamphlet. The interview was conducted by Fight Back! editor Mick Kelly, who is also responsible for the international work of Freedom Road Socialist Organization (FRSO).

Fight Back!: In the Philippines, there is a people's war taking place, for basic social change. Why?

Jose Maria Sison: The Philippines is a semi-colonial and semi-feudal country. Corresponding to that is the bourgeois democratic revolution of the new type. That is to say, it's of the new type because it's under working-class leadership - no longer under the bourgeois leadership, as in the old democratic revolution. One other way of phrasing what I call the 'bourgeois democratic revolution, the new type'; they seem to call it 'the people's democratic revolution with a socialist perspective.' And you know, the kind of character, as a new type of democratic revolution is determined by its class leadership - the working class - and the working class is the force that carries over the revolution from the democratic stage to the socialist stage of the revolution.

course, the rest of Indochina would follow, but the key point is this is one country where the U.S. [pauses]. You know, in the Korean War, the U.S. set a kind of stalemate, ending in the armistice agreement. But of course, in another sense, the U.S. was effectively frustrated in trying to dominate the north, or the DPRK. [returns to Vietnam topic] So a whole country driving away U.S. imperialism, the Vietnamese people achieved that.

And the American people contributed to that victory, because, inside the U.S., they demonstrated the unjustness of the war of aggression. The people showed the costliness and futility of all those bombs being thrown at the Vietnamese people. And so, the U.S. was compelled to retreat, to withdraw from Vietnam - mainly through the struggle of the Vietnamese people, but, you must also take into account what the American people did, in order to discourage the U.S. from going further in the war.

But anyway, they could not really go further in any justifiable way. Even in the boardrooms of the monopoly bourgeoisie, the U.S. comforted itself, 'Well, it's better to act like good businessmen. We just don't throw our metals and chemicals at Vietnam, we better sell our weapons to the oil-producing countries.' That's how they shifted, they justified the withdrawal from Vietnam.

But we have always regarded the support of the American people to the Vietnamese struggle as a model for us, and we take advantage of the fact that there has been this colonial and neo-colonial relationship, and there are quite a number of Filipinos - as early as the early 70s - they acknowledged we were 4 million Filipinos - you certainly have that figure if you also count in the Filipino-Americans, the second generation that has no more plans of going back to the Philippines. So, we have billions. The Vietnamese had less.

The Filipinos in the U.S., being able to cooperate with their solidarity friends of various nationalities within the U.S., we can do better in fighting against a common enemy right in the belly of the beast.

Sison: The Filipino people are trying hard to continue and advance the revolution. The people take pride in being able to develop the revolutionary forces, despite what may be called even a strategic retreat of the anti-imperialist and socialist cause since 1991.

The Filipino people are doing everything possible. The Filipino people become aware of their duty to wage the revolution no matter how long it takes. It took us 300 years to liberate ourselves from Spanish colonialism, and for a while we were a standout, before the U.S. imperialists intervened. We were the first to liberate ourselves from a Western colonial power, and that's a big prize. As we sort of performed the role of being this torch-bearer in our part of the world, at least in Southeast Asia, that's an inspiring thing to think of.

So, we are doing our best to be able to contribute to the resurgence of the world proletarian revolution and the broad anti-imperialist struggle. In turn, as we have the spirit of helping the proletariat and the people of the world to advance the revolution, possibly in all countries and continents. We expect that their struggles contribute to our own strengthening. So, there's interaction between the proletariat and people in various countries, be these countries that are the advanced industrialist capitalist countries, and be they underdeveloped countries - which are still in the majority.

The time will come that more direct exchanges, more direct forms of cooperation will be possible and the stronger ones will help the weaker ones, in terms of moral and material support. The most important thing this is that we help each other by true solidarity, by fighting a common enemy.

We have always thought of the American people as having contributed a decisive help to the victory of the Vietnamese people, who were the first to score definite big victory against U.S. imperialism, I think, in history. The U.S. was defeated, and then of

People's war can be carried out in the Philippines any time, because Philippine society, which is semi-colonial and semi-feudal, is in chronic crisis. It's a country that is agrarian and underdeveloped and most people are in the countryside. They are peasants. So, you have a wide countryside, as the physical terrain for building the New People's Army and carrying out people's war through stages, from small and weak, to bigger, to stronger.

We have three probable stages in the development of the people's war. First stage is strategic defensive, in which we change the balance of forces by launching tactical offensives. You get the weapons from the enemy's side and then you can get onto the strategic stalemate, where there is a parity. In other words, in so many areas, there will be a tug of war, over, let's say, over towns - over town centers and even some small cities.

The enemy cannot hold on to any areas firmly and the NPA must maintain its mobility. When the enemy advances in bigger force, then the NPA retreats, it takes a more advantageous position, and then hits back. Anyway, the final stage is when the force that was on the offensive, on the strategic offensive, is already placed on the defensive, and, so it's now the force that was previously on the strategic defensive that goes on the strategic counter-offensive.

In terms of the growth of the army, when guerilla warfare is predominant in the strategic defensive, but elements of regular mobile warfare will already arise, upon the completion of that stage. And most of the fighting in the strategic offensive will be - most of the crucial fighting will be - done by the regular, by the mobile forces, so there will be bigger units, but with characteristics of mobility: The use of the tactics of concentration, dispersion, and shifting of forces, depending on the circumstances - whatever's advantageous to the revolutionary army.

Now, in the strategic of counter-offensive, there will be instances where in crucial battles there will be some positional warfare, especially to destroy the strongholds and then of course, where certain cities can be taken over, by fighting, then the army that wins, the people's army that wins, can leave the place: turn over the city to other types of forces - turn over the cities to the self-defense units, so that it can go - to beat the enemy as well.

So, you never throw away the mobility. But in the strategic counteroffensive you'll see much use of positional warfare and the regular mobile warfare, depending on the situation. You don't tie down your force, because, you know, you have already the momentum of winning, so you don't just keep territory, because you can transfer the matter of governance, peace and order, to the local revolutionary forces.

So that's how we envision its probable course. And additional scheduling of each stage, the stages will appear as the people's war develops. There can be even some zig zag - yeah it can happen - but the general course is from victory to victory.

Now, it is crucial that the working class is the lead factor that is taking up the democratic revolution from the bourgeois. Completely, surely, that with the working class in the leadership of the revolution, that puts the democratic revolution, even if it's reliant on both peasants and workers, surely on the path, towards socialism. The one that is placed in the role of realizing the socialist cause is the working class. The working class leads the main component of proletarian dictatorship, the People's Army. It smashes the military and bureaucratic machinery of the reactionary state. Then it will take over the enterprises that are in the commanding heights of the economy, the sources of raw materials, the main lines of communications. Those will be taken over by the proletarian state.

Duterte echoes the U.S. propaganda that Kim Jong Un is crazy. I thought that he knew well the geopolitics in which the U.S. operates. He doesn't know that the DPRK could be hit like Iraq of Saddam or Libya of Khaddaffi, if it does not have its nuclear weapons for self-defense.

So that's Duterte. I have already mentioned the reasons that Duterte cannot be trusted to comply with what the people demand in terms of social, economic, political and constitutional reforms, to lay the basis for a just and lasting peace.

It's difficult to say whether the negotiations will be able to proceed under Duterte, because Duterte himself cannot guarantee his political survival. He can be thrown out by pro-U.S. elements in the military, or, a broad united front by democratic forces could overthrow him.

For instance, these extra-judicial killings, with impunity, they are becoming sort of a bomb exploding in the face of Duterte, whereas before, it seemed like it was the main factor for gaining his popularity. He was presenting himself as a strongman, using the mean face, and then he was going to do the quick fix. But, he as not solved the problem. Because in the first place, he's just killing poor drug users and addicts. The highest level he went up to was killing three mayors.

But what about the governors and generals? What about his son, who's now reputed to be the lord of the drug lords? The son now is accused of using ports, the ports of Davao and Manila and possibly other ports, in smuggling drugs. So how can he stop the drug problem, if his own son, and if he himself cannot be aware or is aware in cahoots with the son?

Fight Back!: What do you have to say to our readers, to the American people, the people of the U.S.?

And then course, in the offensives made by the U.S. since the 1990s, it wasted the lives of American soldiers and trillions of dollars to carry out those offensives.

However, the U.S. uses the human rights issue in order to justify its domination over countries, to exercise control. It's not so much of the love of human rights, but it is for the love of controlling the puppets.

Even if Duterte says he wishes to maintain an independent foreign policy, the system he has inherited from his predecessors very much is a system that belongs to the U.S. and he has used personnel loyal to the U.S. Lorenzana [Major General Lorenzana, AFP (Ret.), Secretary of National Defense] is a longtime resident of Washington. He has long been connected to JUSMAG [Joint U.S. Military Assistance Group], the military advisor group that decides what kind of weapons to sell to the Philippine armed forces. And of course, the national security advisor, as well as the chief of staff, they are products of American forces, American forces training and also products of inter-operability training exercises in the yearly Balikatan exercises.

So, the U.S. is in control. Duterte may be dramatic, he's as if trying to break off from the U.S. control, but, when the Marawi events came, you see how he was so grateful to the U.S. and he was so ready to accept the deliveries of the U.S. At two ends, Duterte has been manipulated. He has been manipulated by his close-in security advisors, and at another end is the IS creation - the Islamic State creation of the CIA, and the Moussad.

The CPP editorial, the CPP statement, described Duterte as having exposed himself as a tool of aggression, because he's the one who looks insane, and who has admitted using fentanyl, no? Sending him to the skies, having him seated on cloud nine

Democratic reform, land reform, will be carried out. You see, it's when you seize power, all over the country, when you can really carry out, when you can complete land reform - it's no longer here and there, as at present, in the strategic defensive. But when you have power, when the proletariat has already seized power, then the democratic reform, land reform, affecting the majority of the people can be carried out within a relatively short period of time.

But at the same time, there are stages in the development of agricultural cooperation. In the first stage, [it] can be based on certain villages, townships and districts. The third and highest level would be the communes. So, you combine social organization and the building of whatever amount of mechanization you can have.

Of course, whatever old ways of tilling, storing and processing the agricultural products will have to be pursued, pending deliveries from the industrial sector of the economy. And the working class is directly in charge of that part of the economy. Building the industries, also those industries will eventually recruit the peasants whose surplus population will be absorbed, given jobs by socialist industry.

Fight Back!: Very good...

Sison: Then we may also give concessions in the transitional processes. The small and medium entrepreneurs may be given an opportunity to participate in the national recovery, if, let us say, in the process of the revolutionary war, and because of let's say, imperialist blockade, you have difficulties getting all the means necessary for building socialist industry. Well in Russia, you have the New Economic Policy, even then the proletariat will be in command, the proletariat will be in charge of economic planning.

And also, rather than frighten the people with [possessing] professional and technical skills, you can buy them off in a sort of way, you can give higher wages so they don't flee from the country.

Filipino people can also avail of the Filipinos in different countries - Filipinos who work abroad as professionals in technologies and as skilled workers - they can come back, to help in the socialist construction.

So that's the outlook.

***Fight Back!:* How do you see or characterize the government of Philippine President Duterte?**

Sison: Duterte has been well-recommended by the regional leadership of the Communist Party in charge of southern Mindanao region that covers Davao City. So Duterte had been cooperating with the comrades there for nearly three decades. But then he has his own way of doing things. Even before, it was already said that Duterte's capable of saying and doing anything, from the left way, the middle way, or the rightist way. Depending on what serves him from moment to moment. He behaves that way as a bureaucrat capitalist.

But you know, he has a style of not showing of whatever acquisitions he has made. He's a lawyer, he must know how to stash away what he has to hide. He has a big mansion, he donates that, no? And so he's also capable of the grand gesture; he donates his own house for little children, for the use of children with special needs.

But being mayor of Davao can be different from being president, because the president will have to take into account more factors. Among those factors are far, far more powerful than even the supposedly allpowerful president. You have the U.S. and other

So, the Communist Party and the rest of the revolutionary movement have been alerted, and so right now, even Duterte is making some offensives justifying the disengagement that the NDFP has to undertake.

But Duterte has declared the termination, the end, of the peace negotiations three times. Not once has NDF complained and terminated the peace negotiations. So we are on the just and reasonable side on this issue.

***Fight Back!:* What do you have to say about the role of the U.S. in the Philippines?**

Sison: The U.S. has been alerted. The U.S. has certain laws. You don't give aid to governments that violate human rights. Congress people were threatening to reduce aid - as a matter of fact, Duterte's been complaining about not getting the supplies that he wants, appropriate to, you know, supposedly fighting terrorists and so on.

Obama was under advice by congressional leaders and other people to advise Duterte not to kill too many, because the extra-judicial killings were already being done by the thousands, from month to month.

It's another question whether the U.S. is real defender of human rights [chuckles]. There is something hypocritical about U.S. imperialism. The U.S. is responsible for massive human rights violations, massive destruction of lives and property, infrastructure - social infrastructure - in so many countries. The U.S. can be described as the 'number one' violator of human rights - responsible for the death of millions, 10, 20 million since the end of World War II.

he had just arrived in Russia, then went back to the Philippines, and he proclaimed martial law.

The martial law does not cover only the area where the Bangsamoro is, of where the Marawi and Abu Sayyaf groups exist. He made the martial law Mindanao-wide. That means to say, the NPA is 'the enemy!'

Duterte speaks with a forked tongue. "Oh, we are not targeting the NPA." But why Mindanao, nationwide, and why at the level of the national defense department and the level of the armed forces chief of staff, why do they issue the directives against the NPA? And then they repeat threats that martial rule will be extended to the entire country.

So. What enemy will they face? The NPA, and then of course revolutionary forces and the legal democratic forces, especially those concerned about human rights - from the beginning they were critical of these extra-judicial killings in the so-called 'war on drugs.'

There are too many innocents getting killed and the police are emboldened to kill because they are assured of impunity and they are paid 50 thousand pesos per head. It's a scandal!

Well, this is the problem for the revolutionary movement. This may be something like pointed out very early by Ka Oris, the spokesperson of the CPP and the New People's Army.

This campaign popularizing the extra-judicial killings at first posed against this illegal drug trade can be shifted, can be used as a method, against the revolutionary movement. And this could be something like 'Plan Colombia.' At first the paramilitaries units were formed supposedly against the illegal drugs, then then they could be shifted against the FARC and ELN, no?

players on a global scale. And also you have a society that is in chronic crisis, and it is stricken by further crisis - more and more, no?

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But being mayor of Davao can be different from being president, because the president will have to take into account more factors. Among those factors are far, far more powerful than even the supposedly allpowerful president. You have the U.S. and other players on a global scale. And also you have a society that is in chronic crisis, and it is stricken by further crisis - more and more, no?

Because this is a country that drowning in foreign debt. So, if Marcos used to borrow money at the rate of 1.4 billion pesos a year, the succeeding regimes would be borrowing at the annual rate of \$2.8 billion dollars. Marcos ended his term with 27 billion debt from a level of 500 million. Now you have 77 billion. And Duterte expects to be able to borrow from China - one of the most fantastic figures is 167 billion - I don't think China can provide that. But in the October visit of Duterte to China he got 9 billion in pledges, and further talks, I think led to an additional pile of like 6 billion, so they are talking about 15 billion in loans but mainly for infrastructure.

The problem is, that Filipino people have to be alert to, is that, you know, Duterte's open joint undertaking with the Chinese in the exploring and developing the undersea energy resources in the western Philippine sea. The Philippines won the case before the

UN Arbitral Tribunal in accordance with the UN convention on the law of the sea, so the exclusive economic zone, the extended continental shelf, sovereign rights over them are completely, clearly belong to the Philippines. But there are certain features in which the Chinese made reclamation. If you have a wise president, you can take advantage of the multipolar world. You can utilize China and Russia in order to neutralize the longrunning U.S. power. But if you are not wise enough, competent enough, because you see, these countries competing with the U.S. have capitalist operations - if you let them take advantage, well they don't like to pay credit on their side, no? Whoever represents China or Chinese corporations in deals... So, the Philippines must also take care of its interests so there is mutuality of benefit, and you don't get taken advantage of.

The problem is we might lose control over those trillions of dollars worth of energy resources because we cannot pay for excessive loans for infrastructure. So under the World Bank infrastructure projects are a way of drawing away resources from industrial development. That's an old trick of U.S. imperialism, and it should not be repeated - whichever country or whichever bank we deal with.

We have now a testing ground for Duterte. It is you now, the peace negotiations.

***Fight Back!:* Let's hear more about the peace negotiations. Why are they taking place and where are they going?**

Sison: The peace negotiation is a testing ground for Duterte. We demand, the NDFP [National Democratic Front of the Philippines] demands that the Duterte government complies with the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect For Human Rights and international humanitarian law, by releasing the political prisoners, either by one of two methods.

One is by general amnesty, the other is by withdrawal of the charges. Those charges are garbage. According to the CARHRIHL, the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law, those prisoners have been arrested and detained should not have been arrested and detained in the first place, because the charges are trumped up. And many of these political prisoners are not even fighters of the NPA [New People's Army]. After an incident, the military just picked up people from the nearby villages. So the GRP [Government of the Republic of the Philippines] and their obligation to release the political prisoners, there is even more demand for compensation - for apology and compensation.

Duterte so far has not passed the test. A year has passed, and his promise to comply with CARHRIHL has not been done. There are supposed to be six grades which he must pass. He hasn't passed grade one.

It is obvious in the peace negotiations, there is so much delay. Even if there are already four successful - we call them successful - because there are some advances, but we notice that at a certain point, there may be no success whatsoever, because the GRP or the Duterte government insists that there must be a protracted and indefinite joint or bilateral ceasefire ahead of everything. And you know if the NDFP agrees to that, that would be very bad. People will say, "What about the social and economic reforms?" At least those must be taken up in advance of this ceasefire. In fact, properly, the permanent truce is a subject matter of the end - it's the fourth item under the rubric of "end of hostilities and the disposition of forces." So, this is a problem.

Now, Duterte, I think, he's quite unstable or stupid, no? He had this Marawi problem. First, he underestimated it then he overestimated - well he, for a while, probably for a day or so he was underestimating the problem but when the fighting started,