

CPP founder Sison recycles anti-Trotskyist lies of Ho Chi Minh

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The founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) Jose Maria Sison is engaged in a desperate campaign to vilify and intimidate historian Joseph Scalice who has established unequivocally that Sison and the CPP supported the country's fascistic President Rodrigo Duterte and his murderous "war on drugs." Not only has Sison slandered Scalice as a CIA agent. He is also dredging up all of the old Stalinist filth and lies against Leon Trotsky and Trotskyism.

In the process, Sison is making absolutely clear that the CPP's political line and program derives not from Marxism but its falsifiers—Stalin, Mao Zedong and their various followers. The Stalinists rejected the perspective of world socialist revolution on which Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks based the 1917 October Revolution, usurped power from the working class and justified their own bureaucratic regime on the reactionary nationalist program of "socialism in one country."

The Stalinist campaign of lies and repression against the defenders of genuine Marxism and socialist internationalism culminated in the 1937–38 Moscow Show Trials and the systematic murder of all those who in any way represented the heritage of the October Revolution—a monstrous crime against the working class that Sison and the CPP defends to this day.

In the Russian foreword to his book *The Stalin School of Falsification*, Leon Trotsky explained the political function of these lies:

The so-called struggle against "Trotskyism" grew out of the bureaucratic reaction against the October Revolution and out of the urge for national tranquility. That the past was falsified and altered is not at all due to personal intrigue, nor is it an outgrowth of clique squabbles, as commonly depicted by the banal bourgeois historiographers. It is due to a profound political process, with social roots of its own....

The Soviet bureaucracy, after raising itself above the revolutionary class, could not help experiencing the need, in proportion as it entrenched its independent positions, for such an ideology as would justify its exceptional position and insure it against dissatisfaction from below. It is for this reason that such colossal sweep has been attained by the alteration, perversion and outright counterfeiting of the revolutionary past, still so recent. [*The Stalin School of Falsification*, New Park Publications, 1974, p. xvi]

In his slanders against Trotskyism, Sison invents nothing new. His frantic efforts to blacken the name of Leon Trotsky and Trotskyism rely on recycling the lies used by Stalin and his gangsters to justify their bureaucratic regime and the murder of their opponents. In the wake of Scalice's lecture, Sison has reposted his "Special Study on Trotskyism"—chiefly a series of slides and quotes from Stalin and

Stalinists, including Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh—originally presented in January 2019 but now unaccompanied by any explanation.

The slide show is an eclectic and self-contradictory collection of brazen Stalinist slanders that were decisively refuted by Trotsky himself and by the historical record: that he underestimated the role of the peasantry; that he advocated an "adventurist" seizure of power by the working class and, at the same time, opposed the October Revolution; that as leader of the Red Army he played no significant role in defeating the imperialist armies that sought to crush the newly established workers' state; and so on ad nauseum.

One aspect that deserves special mention is Sison's highlighting of Ho Chi Minh's denunciation of the Chinese Trotskyists in a letter to the Vietnamese Stalinist Party in May 1939 as "nothing more than a criminal gang, the hounds of Japanese fascism (and international fascism)." Sison has highlighted this particular slide several times on his Facebook page, relying on the fact that the record of the Chinese Trotskyists and of Ho Chi Minh's crimes is not widely known.

Significantly, Ho Chi Minh wrote three letters to the Vietnamese Communist Party in quick succession in May 1939 in the wake of the victory of Vietnamese Trotskyists the previous month in the colonial regional election for Cochinchina, as the southern region was known under French rule. The "United Workers and Peasants" slate led by Ta Thu Thau defeated the bourgeois "constitutionalists" and the Stalinist-backed "Democratic Front," winning 80 percent of the vote—a result that was promptly overturned by the colonial governor-general of French IndoChina.

The Trotskyists opposed the "national defense levy" to provide financial resources for the French military, which the Stalinists supported as part of the orientation of Stalin and the Soviet bureaucracy at that time to the so-called "democratic" imperialists in opposition to the German Nazi regime and its allies. *La Lutte*, published by Trotskyists in Saigon, commented that the Stalinist leaders "have taken yet another step on the road of betrayal. Throwing off their masks as revolutionists, they have become champions of imperialism and openly speak out against emancipation of the oppressed colonial peoples." The support of the Stalinists, led by Ho Chi Minh, for French colonial rule alienated the Vietnamese masses—an orientation that only changed, temporarily, when Stalin signed the notorious Hitler-Stalin pact in August 1939, opening the door for war in Europe.

The Vietnamese Stalinists just as abruptly shifted their support back behind the "democratic" imperialists in line with Stalin's reorientation to the United States and Britain following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. Their slavish support for US imperialism was rewarded by the provision of American arms and the dispatch of a special operations team of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the forerunner of the CIA, to train Ho Chi Minh's guerrillas in the final months of the war in the Pacific. Following the defeat of Japan, Ho Chi Minh welcomed the reinstallation of French colonial rule, which was opposed by the

Vietnamese Trotskyists who mobilised working class opposition in Saigon against it. They were repressed not only by the French, but also by Ho Chi Minh and the Stalinists who murdered Trotskyist leader Ta Thu Thau (see: “Seventy-five years since the Stalinist murder of Vietnamese Trotskyist leader Ta Thu Thau”).

By his emphasis on Ho Chi Minh’s letter, CPP founder Sison signals his support for every one of the crimes and slanders of the Stalinists in Vietnam and elsewhere at the time. Ho regurgitates all the lies about the French and Spanish Trotskyists who opposed the treacherous policies of the Popular Front, which directly subordinated the working class to sections of the bourgeoisie. In Spain, Stalinist murder squads acted as an arm of the Popular Front government in torturing and murdering leftists critical of its policies.

The chief target of Ho’s three letters were the Chinese Trotskyists. They were slandered by Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as supporters of Japanese fascism, just as Leon Trotsky was being branded on the basis of fraudulent fabrications as an agent of Nazi Germany. That did not stop Stalin from signing a non-aggression pact with Hitler just months later as well as a “neutrality pact” with the militarist regime in Tokyo in April, 1941. The Soviet deal with Japan lasted until the final weeks of World War II, even as the Japanese army ruthlessly waged a war to conquer China.

Like Sison’s slanders against historian Scalice, Ho invented nothing new but simply repeated the lies against the Chinese Trotskyists concocted by the CCP out of thin air. In 1937, as Stalin was carrying out the murderous purges directed above all against the Trotskyists in the Soviet Union, Wang Ming and Kang Sheng returned from Moscow to ratchet up the denunciation of the Chinese Trotskyists.

Japanese imperialism, which seized Manchuria in 1931, had launched a full-scale invasion of China in July, 1937. In response, the CCP forged an opportunist front with bourgeois nationalist Chiang Kai-shek and his Kuomintang (KMT) in September, accepting the subordination of its peasant armies to those of the KMT and ending its program of land seizures so as not to alienate its bourgeois allies.

Fearful that its front with Chiang, the notorious butcher of Shanghai workers, would generate widespread popular opposition, the CCP launched a vicious campaign of vilification against the Chinese Trotskyists, who had significant standing in the Chinese working class, especially in Shanghai. Wang Ming told the CCP Politburo in 1937: “In opposing Trotskyism we cannot be charitable. Even if Chen Duxiu is not a Japanese agent, we must say he is.” [*Prophets Unarmed: Chinese Trotskyists in Revolution, War, Jail, and the Return from Limbo*, edited Gregor Benson, Haymarket Books, p.43]

In January, 1938, Kang Sheng published a lengthy article entitled “Eradicate the Trotskyite Criminals, Who Are Enemies of the Nation and Spies of the Japanese” in the CCP’s *Liberation Weekly*. He claimed, without a shred of evidence, that Japan was providing a subsidy of 300 yuan a month to the “Trotskyite Central Committee” and that Chen Duxiu was a Japanese spy and a traitor. These allegations, repeatedly endlessly, including to justify the murder of Trotskyists, were finally withdrawn by the CCP in 1978—a tacit admission that they had been lies all along.

It was Trotsky’s analysis of Stalin’s betrayal of the 1925–27 Chinese Revolution that won the support of layers of the Chinese Communist Party, including its founding chairman Chen Duxiu, and Chinese youth studying in the Soviet Union. Stalin had subordinated the newly-formed CCP politically and organisationally to the bourgeois Kuomintang which Stalin was opportunistically attempting to cultivate as an ally on the world arena.

Despite the warnings of Trotsky and the Left Opposition, Stalin continued to promote Chiang Kai Shek as a revolutionary fighting imperialism right up to the point when the KMT leader unleashed his troops and underworld gangsters against the Shanghai working class in

April, 1927. Thousands of workers and CCP members were murdered as the KMT sought to crush a workers’ uprising against the local warlord. Far from drawing the necessary conclusions from the KMT’s class character, Stalin insisted that no mistakes had been made and subordinated the CCP to the “left” KMT with similar bloody consequences a month later.

CCP leaders such as Chen Duxiu and Peng Shuzhi, who had tried to oppose Stalin’s policies, were expelled from the party. They played a central role in the formation of the Trotskyist Left Opposition in China, which continued to orient to the working class. On the other hand, the CCP retreated to the countryside and increasingly based itself, not on the working class, but on peasant guerrilla armies. It slavishly followed the political perspective elaborated by Stalin to justify the disasters in China and which damaged and deformed the revolution when it took place 22 years later in 1949.

Maoism based itself on Stalin’s revival of the Menshevik two-stage theory that ascribed a progressive role to the national bourgeoisie in carrying out a bourgeois democratic revolution and ruled out any struggle for socialism until a second stage in the distant future. Both Lenin and Trotsky opposed the subordination of the Russian working class by the Mensheviks to the Cadets, the party of the venal Russian liberal bourgeoisie.

In his theory of permanent revolution, which underpinned the October Revolution in 1917, Trotsky explained that the bourgeoisie in countries with a belated capitalist development such as China was incapable of meeting the democratic and social aspirations of the masses. Those tasks fell to the working class, which would be compelled, with the support of the peasant masses, to take power into its own hands and implement socialist measures.

Stalin resurrected the discredited Menshevik theories to justify his promotion of Chiang Kai-shek, claiming that the imperialist oppression of China compelled the bourgeoisie to play a progressive role. However, as Trotsky explained, any genuine struggle against imperialism necessarily involved the rousing of workers and peasants “by connecting their basic and most profound life interests with the cause of the country’s liberation...”

“But everything that brings the oppressed and exploited masses of the toilers to their feet inevitably pushes the national bourgeoisie into an open bloc with the imperialists. The class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the masses of workers and peasants is not weakened, but, on the contrary, sharpened by imperialist oppression, to the point of bloody civil war at every serious conflict.” [“The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin,” *Leon Trotsky on China*, Monad Press, 1978, p. 161]

The Chinese Left Opposition carried out a courageous struggle to educate the working class in the political lessons of the defeated 1925–27 revolution and to mobilise it against the Chiang Kai-shek regime. It confronted repression not only from the KMT and the British and French colonial police in the foreign concessions, as well as the Japanese forces following the 1937 invasion, but also by the CCP. Chen Duxiu and Peng Shuzhi were arrested by the KMT police in October 1932, along with a number of their comrades, and spent five years in prison.

Despite the intense repression, groups of Chinese Trotskyists, isolated from each other and the international movement, continued their political struggle in sections of the working class, and actively participated in the war against the Japanese invasion while maintaining their political independence from the CCP and Kuomintang. In a report published in the *Fourth International* in August, 1947, Peng Shuzhi detailed the work of the Chinese Trotskyists during the war, drawing attention to their involvement in strikes in Japanese occupied Shanghai and southern China where they faced the dangers of arrest, torture, jail and execution.

In the coastal province of Shandong, a young Trotskyist, Cheong Li-ming, established a small guerrilla unit that grew, as a result of its

successes, to an army of 2,000, which not only fought the Japanese, but murderous attacks by the CCP and the KMT. After suffering bad losses in a battle against the Japanese, the Stalinists seized the opportunity and arrested Cheong along with his wife, son, and several others.

“At first the Stalinists tried to get a denunciation of Trotskyism out of Cheong. When they found it impossible to bend his will, they mercilessly beheaded him. His wife and all other captives were shot. Even the six-year-old innocent boy was not spared by the Stalinist beasts. He was thrown into the sea and drowned. Comrades! We, Chinese Trotskyists—our knowledge of Stalinism has nothing abstract in it,” Peng wrote.

After Mao and the CCP seized power in 1949, the Chinese Trotskyists led a semi-legal existence and decided that several of their leaders, including Peng and his wife, should go into exile or operate from Hong Kong. Amid growing working-class unrest in the midst of the Korean War, the CCP, terrified that the influence of the Trotskyists would grow, conducted a nationwide sweep on December 22, 1952 and again on January 8, 1953.

Hundreds of Chinese Trotskyists, along with their wives, relatives, friends and sympathisers were arrested and jailed. Many of the leaders were only finally released in mid-1979. But to this day they have not been politically rehabilitated, reflecting the fear in the CCP regime that their courageous and principled struggles will inspire a renewal of authentic Marxism, that is Trotskyism, in China and more widely.

The legacy of Stalinism and Maoism in Asia and internationally can inspire no-one who is seriously interested in taking up the struggle to abolish capitalism and acts as a political barrier to the construction of genuine revolutionary parties.

Sison exploits the lies of Ho Chi Minh in a bid to trade on the tattered reputation of the Stalinist leader who gained international prominence as a result of the anti-colonial struggles of the Vietnamese masses and the war against French colonialism then the US military machine. Like Mao, Ho Chi Minh was oriented not to the working class but to the peasantry and, basing himself on the two-stage theory, repeatedly sought an accommodation with imperialism, which ensured that the war dragged on with even greater losses to the Vietnamese people.

While Ho Chi Minh died in 1969, the regime that he led was based on the reactionary nationalist program of “socialism in one country.” Following the defeat of the US and its puppet regime in southern Vietnam in 1975, the so-called Socialist Republic of Vietnam rapidly found itself in an economic blind alley. Its response to the US diplomatic and economic blockade was to appease American imperialism and transform the country into a cheap labour platform for transnational investors under its 1986 *doi moi* policy.

Since formal diplomatic relations were established between the US and Vietnam in 1995, trade has risen from \$US450 million in 1994 to \$US77 billion in 2019. As capitalist market relations have flourished, major global corporations, including American firms such as Apple, Intel, Qualcomm and Nike have moved production to Vietnam to take advantage of cheap labour disciplined by the Stalinist police state. As a consequence, social inequality has grown. The Vietnamese regime has also strengthened military ties with US imperialism becoming a potential ally in US war preparations against China. Washington lifted a ban on legal arms sales to Vietnam in 2016, and in 2018, the USS Carl Vinson became the first aircraft carrier to mark a port call since the end of the Vietnam War.

Paralleling the embrace of capitalist restoration by the Stalinist bureaucracies in the former Soviet Union, China and Eastern Europe, the proponents of the “armed struggle,” one after another—whether the Maoists in Nepal, the PLO in the Middle East or the ANC in South Africa—have exchanged their military fatigues and AK-47s for seats in parliament and places on corporate boards. In the Philippines, it is not from want of trying that the CPP has yet to follow the same path. Sison

reacted so viciously to the lecture of Dr. Joseph Scalice because it comprehensively exposed the CPP’s support for the election of, and its attempts to forge an alliance with, the fascistic Rodrigo Duterte as Philippine president, right at the point where the CPP is joining the bourgeois political bandwagon to oust him and install Vice-President Leni Robredo (see: “Political crisis in the Philippines intensifies”).

For workers and youth in the Philippines, Asia and internationally, Sison’s dredging up of the old Stalinist lies poses the necessity of seriously studying the fight waged by the Trotskyist movement against the betrayals of Stalinism in the course of the 20th century. These provide the essential theoretical and political basis for the necessary building of revolutionary leaderships of the working class as sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement.



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