

“Falsifications and slander are the weapons of Stalinism”

Joseph Scalice responds to Stalinist attacks over Diliman Commune article

Joseph Scalice
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On February 5, historian Joseph Scalice published an opinion piece in Rappler, a major daily news publication in the Philippines, examining the political lessons of the fiftieth anniversary of the event known as the ‘Diliman Commune.’ The World Socialist Web Site republished the statement on February 8.

Dr. Scalice’s article exposed the role played by the Stalinist Communist Party of the Philippines in channeling the mass unrest of the early 1970s behind the interests of a faction of the ruling elite in the name of the program of ‘national democracy.’ He was writing in response to a Rappler comment based on the standard ‘left’ narrative of the ‘Commune’ which has focused on its supposed spontaneous, isolated and victorious character. Scalice revealed these to be myths, adding: “As is always the case, the glorification of spontaneity serves to cover up the historical betrayals of leadership.”

The upholders of the Stalinist perspective of national democracy responded to Scalice’s article with slander and ad hominem attacks. On February 6, Scalice published a response to these attacks on his Facebook page, which the WSWS is republishing below.

What my *Rappler* editorial on the Diliman Commune exposed was the unserious character of the historical celebrations conducted by the national democratic movement. No one has yet responded seriously to my arguments that the barricades were not spontaneous but rather were planned, that they were not limited to Diliman, and that they ended in defeat.

Rather we find that the sole engagement with my scholarship by representatives of “national democracy” is ad hominem dismissal. E. San Juan Jr., emeritus professor of English, Ethnic Studies, and Comp Lit at

several US universities, exemplified this scholarly dishonesty and unseriousness when he wrote today, “This Trot may just be using this occasion to attract attention; just ignore unless he has a huge following; Trots are incorrigible wreckers since Trotsky himself bred sour grapes....”

Orly Putong, one of the authors of a *Rappler* article on the Commune to which my editorial responded, wrote: “Trotskyites like Scalice are nothing more than pseudo-revolutionaries who spend more time slandering genuine activism than actually participating in the mass movement. They are appendage [*sic*] of imperialism that aims to spread poison and confusion in a surging mass movement. Their ‘permanent revolution’ is nothing more than a pipe dream.

“Scalice tries so hard to present himself as an expert in the history of the Philippine mass movement, but his only expertise are [*sic*] historical revisionism and intrigue.

“In the time of intense fascism, it also crucial [*sic*] to expose sham intellectuals who dupe and confuse the people.”

It is only possible to formulate a political program capable of defending the working class against the imminent threat of dictatorship by a careful and honest examination of history. Neither the CPP nor the national democratic movement has any concern for historical truth.

When I spoke last year on the CPP’s support for Duterte in 2016, Sison lied through his teeth to cover up the role played by the party. He denied that the party had ever supported Duterte and slandered me as a “CIA agent” and a “paid informant for the Duterte deathsquads.” Now, again, we see that the

representatives of the perspective of national democracy are unconcerned with facts and instead resort to slander and ad hominem attacks.

The membership of the national democratic movement followed suit. I have today on Twitter been repeatedly racially attacked, been told, “know your damn place, honky,” accused of “whitesplaining,” and called “an opportunistic son of a bitch.” This is deeply reactionary, racist language. They are making no attempt to deal with arguments or evidence; they attempt to dismiss me with ad hominem.

To maintain the myth of the isolated and spontaneous Diliman Commune in the face of the evidence which I provided in my 2018 Philippine Studies article requires an act of scholarly dishonesty, falsifying the historical record.

Six students and youth died on the barricades in the University Belt from February 1 to 9. Among the killed were Danilo Rabaja, 19, of the Philippine College of Commerce; Renato Abrenica, 24, of UST; Roberto Tolosa, a 12-year-old sweepstakes ticket vendor shot in the back by the police; and Fernando Duque, 19, a UST student.

Pastor Mesina, who was shot at UP Diliman, is commemorated at the Bantayog ng mga Bayani [Monument of Heroes, a wall of remembrance honoring the victims of the Marcos’ regime]. The names and memories of the dead from downtown were politically inconvenient; they were deliberately forgotten in service to the construction of the narrative of the spontaneous and victorious commune.

The barricades of Los Baños and the University Belt were erected simultaneously with those of Diliman. They lasted until February 9 when they were taken down in a coordinated fashion as a result of centralized instructions. They achieved no gains, they split the jeepney driver strike, and they cost the Diliman radicals the 1971 campus elections. They did nothing to direct student anger behind an independent political program of the working class capable of preventing the emergence of dictatorship. Rather, within months, the KM and SDK instructed their membership to enter into conservative organizations such as the Lions’ Club, the Jaycees, fraternities, and religious groups, to campaign for the Liberal Party in the November election.

None of the historical scholars celebrating the commune have engaged with this material. They are

not obligated to agree with my arguments but they must deal with the evidence.

A serious scholarly response would begin something like this: “Scalice has brought forward important new evidence that requires a re-examination of our understanding of the Commune. This is what we constructively learn from his scholarship... In the end, we disagree with his conclusions for these reasons...”

This is not the case. Their conduct reveals a tendentious and frankly dishonest approach.

If you are on the fence about the possibility of reforming the national democratic movement and working within it to defend democracy, pay careful attention to the manner in which they deal with their own history. The honest assessment of history is the bedrock of revolutionary politics. Falsifications and slander, on the other hand, are the primary weapons of Stalinism.



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