

Five Kinds of Insurrectionism

CPP (Central Committee)
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(**Note:** Insurrectionism is inseparably combined with “regularization” in the line originally promoted by the Mindanao commission since the early 1980s and promoted nationwide by the NPA general command since the mid-1980s. However, if a distinction has to be made between the two combinates, insurrectionism is the ideological spearhead against the theory of protracted people’s war and “regularization” has been the larger and more effective organizationally in causing self-constriction, self-destruction and the now alarming drastic reduction of the rural mass base.

But the reason for discussing only insurrectionism here is to respond to the feedbacks to the editorial in the second issue of Rebolusyon 1991. This attention to insurrectionism should not be interpreted as evaluating insurrectionism to be worse than “regularization” in all respects. The article below also seeks to clarify that among several kinds of insurrectionism, what is most destructive to the Party and the entire movement is that most systematized and most applied kind which has been inseparably linked with “regularization”. “Regularization” deserves an even longer piece than the subject of insurrectionism.)

Five kinds of insurrectionism have been pushed in the Philippines since the early 1980s. All of these try to spread and implement the theory of spontaneous masses. In the wish to hasten revolutionary victory, spontaneous uprisings of the masses is actually rated higher than steady and solid organizing of a proletarian revolutionary party and other revolutionary forces. The premium is put on sweeping propaganda, street activism, transport paralisation by armed units and other dramatic acts of violence rather than on painstaking mass work.

The role of the organized revolutionary masses as well as that of the organized enemy (U.S., big business, Church, AFP, etc.) is obscured as in the insurrectionist interpretations of the Edsa uprising in 1986. The actual level of development of the organized revolutionary forces is not fully taken into account. Spontaneous mass uprisings are expected to be the decisive factor in changing the overall balance of forces between revolution and counterrevolution and even in seizing political power, irrespective of the development of people’s war and the people’s army in the countryside.

All these kinds of insurrectionism run counter to the Party’s general line of new democratic revolution (that requires the leading role of the working class through the Party) and the strategic line of people’s war (which is an armed revolutionary mass movement, building in stages the basic worker-peasant alliance and the people’s army as the force to smash and replace the bureaucratic-military machinery of the reactionary state).

1. One kind of insurrectionism proposes to stop the current revolutionary armed struggle and carry out a protracted or indefinite legal struggle until it becomes possible and necessary to launch mass uprisings for seizing political power. This has practically no outright proponent within the Party.

Originally and continuously, this has been promoted by the Lava revisionist group and its successors, in emulation of the Russian paradigm of uprisings in Petrograd and Moscow (minus the more extended armed struggle in the countryside during the civil war and anti-interventionist war), which were preceded by a long period of legal struggle.

But since after the Edsa uprising of 1986, this idea of parliamentarism before insurrection has been proposed by a writer belonging to a petty-bourgeois populist group. In 1986 and 1987, the proposal was for the revolutionary forces to stop the armed struggle, cooperate with the Aquino regime and combine with it against the coup schemes of other reactionary forces.

This kind of insurrectionism spread a number of false propositions, such as the following:

a. Political struggle is limited to legal struggle while waging a people's war and building the people's army is viewed as purely military. Such a counterposing of the terms political and military denies the political character of the people's war.

It accuses the Party and the New People's Army of militarism for simply pursuing the revolutionary armed struggle against the U.S.-Aquino regime. It also takes advantage of the errors connected with excessive or inappropriate armed city partisan actions supposedly for the purpose of raising armed urban insurrectionary consciousness or preparing for urban insurrection.

The rise to power of the “liberal democratic” Aquino ruling clique was purely or mainly the result of “people power”, with the proletarian revolutionary party and revolutionary mass movement “excluded”.

Because of the boycott error of 1986, the role of the revolutionary forces in the long-term anti-fascist resistance and Edsa uprising is denied. The convergence of revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces which caused the fall of the Marcos fascist regime is obscured. The “democratic space” is owed to the Aquino regime and not to the legal democratic movement and the armed revolutionary movement.

Within the Party, this kind of insurrectionism is merely a latent or potential fallback position for the more hot-headed insurrectionists, if after a long time the armed urban insurrection does not come. Omar Tupas (in Debate) now proposes insurrection or else peaceful settlement.

2. A second kind of insurrectionism avows itself as still being within the framework of people's war and aims only to ride on and accelerate the tendency of the ruling system to disintegrate by deliberately using armed city partisan actions (such as bus burning) during mass actions to inspire the unorganized masses to spontaneous action. The dangerous element in this kind of

insurrectionism is the close and direct linkage of the violent actions of armed city partisans with the actions of the legal mass organizations.

This kind of insurrectionism is generated by elements in Metro Manila and other urban areas. It holds the view that although armed city uprisings cannot seize and keep power in the cities independent of the development of people's war, these can strengthen the revolutionary forces in the city and can lead to a change in the balance of forces and possibly a sharing of power between the revolutionary forces and sections of the reactionary ruling classes or, if the disintegration of the ruling system allows, to a final seizure of power by the revolutionary forces.

The proponents of this kind of insurrectionism stress the study of the historical experience of the Bolsheviks and the works of Lenin, especially with regard to the study of urban legal struggle and urban uprisings. But they miss the point about the legal mass actions in Russia being the target of enemy violence rather than being the initiator of violence before the February and October 1917 revolutions came. However, when confronted, they do not deny the concrete conditions of the Philippines, the Party's line of people's war and the requirements of urban legal struggle, especially with regard to the trade union movement.

While the proponents of this kind of insurrectionism differentiate themselves from those of other kinds, they have features strongly similar to those of the other kinds which should be noted. The similarity is generally in terms of depending on the spontaneous masses and specifically in terms of using armed city partisans, transport paralysis rather than mass actions, and use of city partisan groups supposedly to incite violence during legal mass actions.

This kind of insurrectionism has had adverse consequences proven to be detrimental to the Party and the revolutionary mass movements.

Party cadres and mass activists who otherwise would be encouraged to do work for the mass movement or join the people's army in the countryside are enrolled first in the groups of armed city partisans. The recruitment of armed city partisans has also been quite loose as to include unqualified elements, especially lumpen proletarians. At least some of the activities are also impermissible. Others have turned off a portion of public opinion. The maintenance of a few hundreds of armed city partisans already constitutes a significant drain on the Party's personnel and resources, which would be better allocated to comprehensive grassroots organizing work.

While it affirms that the character of the struggle in urban areas is principally legal and defensive, its advocacy of dramatic violent actions during legal mass actions prejudice the urban legal struggle and the legal democratic mass movement. So far, the enemy has not yet used any of the armed urban actions as pretext for wiping out the legal mass organizations, except in local communities. But the danger is there.

3. A third kind of insurrectionism systematically creates ideological, political and organizational confusion and in combination with the recycled version of the Jose Lava line of quick military victory has already caused severe damage to the Party and the revolutionary mass movement, first in Mindanao and then on a nationwide scale.

This is the worst kind. It rates the exceptional case of the Sandinista armed “urban” insurrection (the final offensive in isolation) as being superior to the Chinese and Indochinese experience of people’s war as well as to our own practice of people’s war which has yielded a substantial amount of success in building Red political power. [The Marty Villalobos variety puts a premium on the “fast track” seizure of power thru armed urban insurrection while protracted people’s war is denigrated as being outdated and inapplicable in a Philippines that is as “urbanized” as Nicaragua.]

Documents of the Mindanao commission stress that the combination of political (urban or “white area”) forces and military (countryside-people’s army) forces will create the insurrectionary or revolutionary situation.

a. This kind of insurrectionism attacks the ideological and political line of the Party in the following ways:

1) The general description of Philippine society as semicolonial and semifeudal (from which the general line of national democratic revolution and the people’s war is drawn) is considered inadequate because the Philippine society is more “urban” (40 percent) than has been presupposed. The Party is therefore held liable for having reduced the importance of urban work and neglected urban work. The theory of people’s war and strategic line of encircling the cities from the countryside need to be “refined” and “readjusted” in view of the “true” demographic configuration (higher degree of urbanization). The Sandinista paradigm of armed urban insurrection is considered applicable to the Philippines because the degree of “urbanization” of Nicaragua approximates that of the Philippines.

2) Because this kind of insurrectionism has been in combination with the line of hastening military victory (through premature and nonsustainable larger NPA formations), the proponents who are the drafters of the “new strategy” papers pay lip service to people’s war and then proceed to attack people’s war on the same page under the guise of “refining” and “readjusting” it.

3) The first “refinement” and “readjustment” is the redefinition and confusion of the terms political and military. Political is counterposed to military on the same plane. Political struggles (pakikibakang pampulitika) are those that are waged principally by popular forces and the armed strength of the masses or by the political forces principally in the urban areas. Armed struggle or military struggle is defined as being principally launched in the countryside and principally relying on the armed forces or the army (hukbo) and is focused on the objective of defeating the military force of the regime.

“Political forces” are defined as the popular forces and armed strength of the masses in the urban areas, while the military forces mean the New People’s Army in the countryside. It is within this frame that the NPA is “regularized” as military force to fight in the countryside where the character of the struggle is military. Political and military struggles (or the political forces and the armed forces) should be combined in a political-military struggle to create a revolutionary situation for an armed insurrection — the highest form of political struggle that the movement must achieve.

4) The next “refinement” or “readjustment” is the superimposition of the wishful thinking for an armed insurrection on the going necessity and reality of people’s war. In the new alchemy the people’s army is reduced by wishful thinking to a status secondary to the so-called “political forces” in the urban areas with their own armed component, the armed city partisans. Considered the highest point of the political-military struggle is the urban armed insurrection. The conditions for armed uprising are to be achieved through three “strategic coordinations and combinations”: coordination and combination of armed struggle and political struggle; coordination and combination of struggle in the countryside and struggle in the cities; coordination and combination of the struggle in the country and the struggle outside the country.

[Note that in the recombination, the military aspect of the struggle assumes greater importance and overwhelms the political as in practice — in the policy of “regularization”, regional committees became at the same time army operational commands and became absorbed in military work to the neglect of comprehensive territorial work, as cadres were absorbed by staff needs of the regularized “armed force” and as that armed force itself was taken away from mass work and became alienated from the masses. In the urban areas where “political struggles are supposed to be principal, armed city partisan actions also militarized the situation to the point that the “political forces” also became alienated from the movement and was eventually turned against the revolutionary movement (as in “Nicaragdao” in Davao City) by enemy tactic of organizing paramilitary groups, such as Alsa Masa. Hence, the resulting combination is not “pol-mil” but “mil-mil”.]

The theoretical or even common sense understanding of the stages of development, such as the beginning of the New People’s Army from scratch in 1969 until it is in a position to smash and replace the bureaucratic- military machinery, is denigrated.

The probable course of development, entailing initial, middle and final stages is missed by this kind of insurrectionism because it flies away from reality and simply wishes for a leap to total victory. It fails to recognize the popular and political character of the organs of political power, mass organizations and the people’s army in the countryside. Despite the obvious subordination of all these to a mere wish for armed urban insurrection, those who are for quick military victory uncritically agree with the urban insurrectionist because they are in the same urban-based commission, “positioned” to win total victory without having to go through the stages of people’s war.

The consequences have been the following:

1) In 1984 the Mindanao commission could no longer stay in any city in Mindanao and had to transfer to another city in another island outside of its jurisdiction. The “insurrectionists” thru stepped-up armed city partisan actions always heated up the city where they were and exposed themselves because of bravado. They were never able to mass more than 10,000 people at any one point at any time. Their welgang bayans were often mainly transport paralysis effected by armed groups conducting “checkpoints”. The premature and nonsustainable larger formations, which had absorbed cadres and resources and had reduced the mass base, were already in a passive and isolated position in the face of the enemy forces.

The siege mentality and sense of panic which started in 1984 became full-scale panic taking the form of the anti-informer hysteria in 1985 in both urban and rural areas. The principal leaders of the Mindanao commission were absent but their line had taken effect and continued to run in Mindanao. Never before had the Party and revolutionary mass movement suffered the following disaster: close to a thousand victims of misjudgment, the drop of party membership from 9000 to 3000 and the shrinkage of a narrow and shallow kind of mass base by 70 percent.

2) The leaders principally responsible for the wrong line of urban insurrectionism and quick military victory and the disastrous results of the line were never taken to account. Instead, they were promoted to high positions and were able to push on a nationwide scale their wrong line.

They rode on their reputation due to the 1981 to 1984 offensives in Mindanao, played up the boycott error of 1986 and succeeded to obscure the fact that earlier in 1985 their wrong line had already caused an incomparably far greater disaster to the Party and the revolutionary movement.

Exactly at the time that they were demanding a departure from the line of people's war in 1985, their wrong line was proving to be disastrous. But from 1986 onwards, they had their way. The results of armed urban insurrectionism cum premature nonsustainable NPA formations are the following:

a. "Regularization" has meant urbanization and bureaucratization of the NPA general staff, top heavy expenses and "hanapbuhay" (gangsterism);

The fixation and eventual wiping out of the NPA general command and general staff in Metro Manila (the story of Davao City all over again);

c. The stagnation of the New People's Army which is preoccupied with the logistical needs of the premature and nonsustainable larger formations, concentrated in a small radius even when not on an offensive; and

d. The drastic reduction of the mass base through the self-constriction of cadres and resources into staff of urban-based organs and prematurely enlarged military formations.

4. The "strategic counteroffensive" within the strategic defensive was a form of insurrectionism insofar as the model it emulated was the Vietnamese Tet offensive of 1968 and sought to achieve something like this. The central leadership withdrew the concept of the "strategic counter offensive" in 1988.

The concept was devised by the central leadership in the early 1980s in the course of a competition of concepts for "innovating on" or "surpassing" the theory of people's war and accelerating the speed of the revolutionary process either towards total victory or a sharing of power with some sections of the ruling classes.

There was a rapid rhetorical advance from the early to the advanced substages of the strategic defensive and further on to the "strategic counteroffensive".

In an apparent attempt to open a “new path,” the central leadership actually declared that the road of the Philippine armed revolution is neither the Bolshevik example nor the Chinese example.

Although the concept of “strategic counter offensive” limited itself to being a substage (the final one) of the strategic defensive, there was an element of Left opportunism (pagbabakasakali) that the “strategic counteroffensive” could bring down the entire ruling system, with the Marcos fascist regime, irrespective of the strength of the people’s army and the revolutionary forces.

The SCO concept whipped up the wind of questioning and undermining of the theory of people’s war and the depreciation of Mao in favor of the Bolshevik uprising paradigm (minus the more extended armed struggle in the countryside in the civil war and anti-intervention war), the Sandinista paradigm, especially the final offensive minus the two other tendencies — protracted war and proletarian — and only certain parts of the Vietnamese people’s war, like the Tet offensive, the Soviet supply of sophisticated weapons and tactics of blows to the head.

The element of “Left opportunism” links the SCO line to the various kinds of insurrectionism. The SCO concept also flew away from the level of the development of our armed struggle (guerrilla warfare, involving HPRs which we can count and whose potential we should not mystify).

5. A fifth kind of insurrectionism seeks to push the peasant masses into uprisings for the immediate attainment of the maximum kind of land reform, entailing the confiscation of land, warehouses, houses and other properties of landlords. Some elements must have read Mao’s work on the autumn harvest uprising but failed to recognize that the Chinese land reform program during the anti-Japanese struggle is more suitable to the current level of our revolutionary strength in the Philippines.

The worst proposal is to encourage “uprisings” by peasants supported by units of the people’s army in order to raid and confiscate certain assets and destroy those that cannot be taken over like municipal buildings, nurseries and so on. Obviously, those who made this kind of proposal do not understand that there are certain physical structures which the revolutionary movement and the people’s government will eventually use for the public good and which the people will always respect.

We have not in fact fully and widely carried out the minimum land reform program (rent reduction, reduction of interest rates, better farm wages, better prices at the farm gate and increased production through rudimentary forms of cooperation, etc.) in our guerrilla fronts. We still have to rectify the root causes of the ongoing drastic reduction of our rural mass base. Calls for peasant uprisings at this point should not obscure the fact that we still have a lot to do in solid peasant organizing in both our old and new areas.

It is possible to have some peasant uprisings. But how far can we go?

When the peasants are well organized and the people’s army is behind them, they can hold back the produce of the land and compel the landlord or his representative to come to the farm to

negotiate. When the peasants are not well organized and there is insufficient or no people's army behind it, why go for a line of rousing them and putting them into violent confrontations with or, into the firing line of, well-organized and well-armed opponents.

To leap into the maximum land reform program is to leap into disaster, not victory. It would mean goading both enlightened and despotic landlords and all the small, medium and big landlords to unite against us not only in our guerrilla fronts (which are mainly in the hinterlands) but also outside, the much larger part of the country.

Are the revolutionary forces strong enough to carry out and defend the maximum land reform program as the general line. We may be strong in our guerrilla fronts but what about the rest of the country where a unified landlord class will anticipate us? Do we have enough cadres to administer the fair and equitable redistribution of the land? Can we set up the productive, financial, marketing and technical system to replace the existing one?

Let us consider the peasant uprisings for the confiscation of land (or burning of land titles) in our country (Tayug and Colorum uprisings), in China and Vietnam in the twenties and thirties and in India (Telengana in 1948 and Naxalbari movement in the late sixties). They did not last long. Our premature land confiscation and distribution of land titles in Nueva Vizcaya and Mindoro (complete with videotaping) should serve as a lesson to us, if nobody now recalls Ramon Sanchez' maximum land reform in Tarlac in 1972 and Sorsogon in 1974.

What succeeded in China and Vietnam was the minimum land reform program during the anti-Japanese struggle. It was only after seizure of political power in China and North Vietnam that the maximum land reform program could be carried out. In the case of the Philippines during the anti-Japanese struggle, peasants in effect took over the land in certain portions of Central Luzon because the generally pro-U.S. landlords were afraid of asking the Japanese military and puppet forces to collect the land rent for them and incurring the ire not only of the Hukbalahap but also the USAFFE. But after World War II, they recovered the land and tried to collect the arrears in land rent.

As exceptions to the general line, land confiscation or restitution of the land to their rightful owners should be carried out against the despotic landlords and the landgrabbers. These exceptions serve the general line in making it clear to the landlords that they lose their land and probably more if they do not negotiate with the peasants and that landgrabbers are never allowed.

Peasant insurrectionism, which leaps into the maximum land reform program, is not a solution. It will aggravate the problem if in the first place we cannot stop the dwindling of Party cadres for rural mass work due to urban based insurrectionism and absorption by the urban-based staff organs.

All the five foregoing kinds of insurrectionism proceed from an urban petty bourgeois stand, viewpoint and method of thinking. The urban petty bourgeoisie wants to decide the course of the Philippines from the convenience, if not comfort, of the urban areas. There is the impetuosity which disregards what it takes to take on and defeat the comprador bourgeoisie and landlord

class (more politically developed and sophisticated those of Somoza's Nicaragua) and the U.S. imperialists behind them.

There is a sea of difference between an understanding of the probable role of insurrection within the framework of people's war and insurrectionism as a system of notions and wishful thinking to attack or replace the theory and line of people's war.

The central leadership of the Party and all good cadres, who have upheld the theory and line of people's war as a major development in Marxist-Leninist theory and practice and, in our national historical experience, as something suitable to our own social and geographic conditions, have correctly stated that people's war encompasses insurrection, when correctly undertaken under certain conditions. There will be instances in the future when the people's army will combine with mass uprisings to seize towns, provincial capitals, small cities and big cities in that probable order.

The probability of uprisings to seize urban areas will not be realized if today's insurrectionists by wishful thinking succeed in putting the Party off the line of people's war and cause damages to the Party and the revolutionary movement, as in Mindanao and currently on a nationwide scale.

It is not enough for the central leadership and the good cadres stay on the correct line of people's war. They must thoroughly criticize and repudiate the various kinds of insurrectionism allows the confusion that these create. Otherwise, some of these will continue to cause confusion and wreak havoc on the Party and the movement.

It is such a pity that the line of armed urban insurrectionism cum premature and unsustainable higher military formations undermines and attacks the theory of people's war and the strategic line of encircling the cities from the countryside in the same period that the Reagan and Bush administration and the counter revolutionaries have adopted and successfully implemented some kind of "people's war" based on tribal and religious anticommunist mass loyalty as in the use of the Unita in Angola, the Renamo in Mozambique, the mujaheddins in Afghanistan and the Contras in Nicaragua.

In the Philippines, it is the AFP trying hard to copy and replace our SYPs (armed propaganda teams) with the SOTs and to build a "mass base" while the number of our SYPs decrease, our mass base has been drastically reduced and militia units have not been organized in many areas. While it is the GRP agencies or pro-GRP NGOs trying hard to field agents in the countryside, most of the urban insurrectionist trends tend to withhold cadres (due to their own staffing needs and ACP building) from the countryside.

If our rural mass base disappears, the strategically superior military forces of the enemy can become effective in encircling and destroying our forces at the tactical level. And if the people's army is defeated, the legal democratic movement in the urban areas will certainly be adversely affected.

[From: <http://www.philippinerevolution.net/documents/five-kinds-of-insurrectionism>
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