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Communist Propaganda in the Philippines - 1950-1953

JOSE M. CRISOL

ANALYSIS OF COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA in the Philippines is made possible by two sources of information: enemy documents and the testimony of captured dissidents. Since Communism is an underground movement here, there is not much overt propaganda. Therefore most propaganda material is captured material. I propose to analyze the trend in Communist propaganda for the period from January 1950 to January 1953.

The basis of the enemy's propaganda is, of course, the Communist revolutionary program. As the program varies, so does the propaganda. Within the period from January 1950 to January 1953 there seems to have been a major shift in the program. Prior to November 1951 the emphasis was on armed revolt, *fostering of the "revolutionary crisis."* Then, with the failure of that program, a shift was made to *psychological warfare*.

COMMUNIST TRIUMPHS

The *General Organizational Report* of the NOD (National Organization Department), a report which was approved by the Secretariat of the Communist Party in the Philippines on August 15, 1951, supplies us with the Party's

own summary at that date of its "Triumphs and Failures since January 1950." Among the "triumphs" this report lists the fact that "class consciousness is now widespread" and that therefore there was unity of action "among our comrades." This was in spite of the fact that late in 1950, the Party had received a terrible blow, when the ranking members of the Politburo and the Secretariat in Manila had been apprehended. Notwithstanding these arrests, according to the August 15th Organizational Report the Party had been able to conduct another CC (Central Committee) conference immediately. The Party had not given up the conviction that a "revolutionary situation" existed and that the program of revolutionary expansion, decided upon in the hills of the Sierra Madre during November 1949, should be carried out.

Continuing its list of triumphs the same Organizational Report says that all RECOS (Regional Commands) were being given the required military cadres, military schools for HMB (*Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan*) National Liberation Army officers had been opened, regular inspections of FC's were being conducted, and the HMB personnel had learned to understand and observe military discipline. The Mountain Province and the entire Ilocano region had been organized into one Regional Command. Satisfactory progress had been made in financial, economic and production tasks but

Due to the extreme caution of the enemy, we were not able to confiscate money from them, as we had done the previous year. The Masses, however, are still giving aid to the Party. This assistance has enabled the higher organs to carry on their tasks for the Revolution.

We see therefore that prior to 1952 the plan of the local Communist Party was to hasten to a climax what it believed was the existing "revolutionary situation." The Party objective was to prepare its ranks, its following and the Masses for the time when the revolutionary situation should have matured into a "revolutionary crisis", which would be the signal for the seizure of power. The date

for this seizure of power, the start of the real revolution, had been set for *November 7, 1951*.

COMMUNIST FAILURES

But the same *General Organizational Report* shows also some "weaknesses." Because of the arrest of the top CLO (Congress of Labor Organizations) leaders, "many intellectuals, professionals and middle-class elements who were formerly sympathetic are now afraid to work for the movement." The report goes on to say that due to the arrests of the CLO leaders

..... the TUD (Trade Union Department) in Manila was not able to assign cadres for the workers' movement in Manila. Because of this, the Party is being confronted with difficulties in regaining its former strength in key industries throughout the nation.

The report lists among the failures the fact that the Party had neglected the Youth and Women's Movements, and laments that the Communists had almost no connections with associations in the leading towns and cities. Intelligence work was slow and the Party had not been able "to infiltrate within the enemy." Communications were admitted to be poor and regular accurate reports by lower organs, particularly the RECOS, to the NOD were not duly submitted.

AUGUST 1951 PROGRESS SHORT OF MAY DAY PLAN

This then was the Party's own summary, on August 15th, of its position on the eve of the revolution in November. It was not quite so sanguine as the statement of a few months before, the so-called *May Day Appeal* (May 1, 1951) to "All Laborers and Peasants" to "Take up arms." The 1951 May Day boast was that "Today our revolutionary force is far stronger than in previous years." It called upon Laborers in the cities to join the armed resistance ...

establish secret unions and fight the common enemy by means of arms, sabotage . . . be ready when the day comes! . . . Peasants in the provinces! The time is now coming to establish *Pansamantalang Pamahalaang Mapanghimagsik* [PPM—Provisional Revolutionary Government] in the barrios and towns . . . The time is coming for you to organize a Committee of Peasants and to start grabbing lands from the feudal landlords. PPM Committees created in every community will decide the redistribution of land equally. The *hacendero* from whom the land is to be confiscated should be liquidated. The PPM will establish *Lupon ng Manggagawa* [a Workers' Committee] in industrial centers. The Committee shall prepare the workers to seize and operate the factory for the masses. The PPM must also establish *Sanggunian ng Baryo o Bayan* [a Barrio or Town Information Center] in every community. This organ will try to stamp out all manifestations of counter-revolution. The PPM will be established in every barrio or town where the movement is very active . . . When victory is in sight, we will establish the PPM in the provinces and then throughout the nation. The PPM, although a secret organization, shall have all the powers and responsibilities of a real government.

The *May Day Appeal* ends with another fiery exhortation to carry out the "proletarian revolution." The revolution in November was to be patterned after that which had succeeded in China. The "main force" of the revolution was to be an "alliance of the peasantry and the proletariat" as distinguished from the orthodox Bolshevik concept that a proletarian revolution should have as its force the proletariat and as its "reserve force," the peasantry.

PREPARATION FOR NOVEMBER 1951 REVOLT

With an eye to this revolution, scheduled for November 1951, the Party embarked upon a systematic program of indoctrination of its members and of its HMB following. At the same time it launched an intensive campaign to win large segments of the country's population in order to secure a "mass base." To estimate the people's discontent and their disposition towards the coming revolution, the Secretariat had a technical organ called the

PEIRA (Political, Economic, Intelligence, Research and Analysis Group). PEIRA evaluated the country's political, economic, and military situation from facts made available to it by the Party's extensive network of information gatherers. (It is routine Party life for Communists to report during meetings on what they see and hear in their respective fields of work.)

In its work of preparation for the November 1951 revolution, Communist propaganda made use not only of the pictured, spoken and written word but also of events deliberately staged. Thus, the HMB were ordered to stage raids, not so much to profit from the forays as to sell the idea to the people that the Communists were powerful enough to seize any town when they wanted to. The raids were also a means of keeping up the morale of the far-flung HMB following in places not easily accessible to communication.

PUBLISHED PROPAGANDA

Written propaganda for the coming revolution was carried on especially through the media of two mimeographed sheets—*Titis* and *Magpalaya*. *Titis* (The Spark) is the name of the official organ of the Communist Party in the Philippines. *Magpalaya* (Liberator) is the official publication of the HMB or "National Liberation Army" and is usually issued by the Regional Commands. In the August 15th report referred to above, both these sheets were described as being "issued regularly by nearly all RECOS." A directive of May 4, 1951 ordered both to be distributed every two weeks. The same May directive ordered the issuance of pamphlets by the NED (National Education Department) once a month: these were to be reproduced in the RECOS. Similarly once a month each RECO was to issue a leaflet in addition to the pamphlet sent by NED.

In the May 4th propaganda directive, orders were given to stress the following issues: high cost of living, high taxes, refusal by America to include in the Japanese peace

treaty reparations to the Philippines for war damage, instances of graft and corruption in the Quirino regime, return of "Mickey Mouse money" in the form of paper "coins," the useless death of Filipino boys in Korea. The directive wanted special leaflets to be issued to the Philippine Army and to the Philippine Constabulary, calling them to revolt. Later this same year 1951 (Dec. 1) special instructions were drawn up on "the manner of converting enemy soldiers." In these efforts particular emphasis was to be given to the conversion of lieutenants and captains. Privates and sergeants did not need the same attention since the direction believed that they would

..... easily obey the orders of their superior officers especially if the officer is good. Majors, colonels and generals are against the revolution because they come from the families of capitalists. It is possible that a few of these officers might be converted. It is necessary to make investigations regarding this matter. Always call for the armed struggle.

All RECOS were also ordered to provide themselves immediately with mimeograph machines and supplies, and detailed instructions were given as to the use of slogans. "The letters HMB should be marked everywhere The best place for slogans is along highways where many vehicles pass. Chalking and painting can be done mostly at night." The directive went on to say that each RECO should provide itself with a "comrade who is an artist" and all RECOS should have a list of people, particularly middle-class people, who might be brought into the movement.

The people, if they cannot be contacted regularly and in person by our comrades, should be mailed our leaflets, our pamphlets and our newspapers. In a city like Manila this should be done on as big a scale as possible and should be done for workers as well as middle-class elements. Warning letters to enemies should be sent from time to time, but we should be subtle and political in our warnings, not crude.

BOTH POLITICAL PARTIES ASSAILED

As we have seen, back in November 1949, after the elections and just before the period under consideration, a "revolutionary situation" had been declared. From that time on Communist propaganda trained its guns more than ever on the government, especially on the Liberal Party whose alleged irregularities were then unfortunately very much in the public press. Early in 1950, however, after the abortive Medrano uprising, the propaganda shifted to the Nacionalistas in the belief that, with the Liberals discredited, only the Nacionalistas remained as rivals for leadership. In spite of this, however, the Communists continued to abet the Nacionalistas' resentment against the anomalies of the 1949 elections, in the hope that a portion of the Nacionalista following would take up the armed struggle. When the Nacionalistas rejected any idea of armed uprising, propaganda was then turned upon the armed forces in order to demoralize the soldiery and weaken their resistance, in preparation for the actual decisive blow planned for November. HMB raids were launched to harass the government's forces, and systematic indoctrination was attempted by infiltration into the armed services.

But all these preparations proved to be in vain because by the time the "revolutionary crisis" arrived the "revolutionary situation" had taken a turn very unfavorable to the Party's aspirations. The arrest of the Politburo and of the CLO had been telling blows, and the appointment of Secretary Magsaysay, together with the Government's stepped-up psychological warfare had made the Party's declaration of May Day and the Organizational Report of August 15th seem like pieces of wishful thinking. Certainly any Report on "Triumphs and Failures since January 1950" would by the end of the year 1951 have been definitely on the debit side.

NEW TREND OF PROPAGANDA

To understand the trend of Communist propaganda

after 1951, namely after the collapse of Communist ambitions as described in the preceding paragraphs, it is necessary to bear in mind that stress passed from the armed struggle of that period to a new "battle for the reserves", or to a battle to win the sympathy of the people towards the Communist revolt. The "battle for the reserves" is largely an ideological struggle. This change of direction was motivated by the realization that the Government forces had control of the country's peace and order situation, and that an armed struggle could not prove successful unless it had behind it the support of the Masses.

From a Party document captured from the Communists and entitled *Three 4-Month Plans for 1952* the following excerpts are self-explanatory:

The Political situation in the Philippines and abroad has changed a lot if we compare it with the situation as of 1951 . . . The Party faces decisive tasks . . . to win the ideological warfare during this stage of the revolution . . . Prepare for a long and radical struggle, ideologically and practically.

Propaganda is emphasized, "offensive, never defensive." The document records the issuance of propaganda in Pampango and Tagalog leaflets at least once a month. It calls for the collection of "items of propaganda of the enemy" (Civil Affairs Office psy-war material). The following issues are to be taken up by the Party's propaganda machinery: the Nacionalista Party, Imperialism, the MSA, ECA, the Mutual Defense Aid Pact, imperialist "war preparation," the New Democracy, "peace", the Revolution.

Other captured Communist material after January 1952 affords instructive examples of this new shift in Party strategy. The propaganda is amazingly versatile and finds material in unexpected places. A startling instance was the *Chain Letter for Peace* issued between February and April 1952. It reads, in part:

You have heard of the atomic bomb. It is a Godless [sic] weapon and it is now being made by the Godless, the American

capitalists These imperialists want to go against the wishes of God *This chain letter will help stop the atomic bombs from falling.* It is a sacred chain that has been blessed by the Bishop of Auvergues [!] and the will and spirit of our Saviour pass along with it This chain letter must be accompanied by prayer. Pray to our Saviour to stop the American imperialists. . . . In the name of Our Saviour let us have peace.

On March 29, 1952 a propaganda document was issued to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the HMB. It shows which way the wind was blowing. "This is a long struggle", say the Huks. They were irritated by the peaceful elections of November 1951, the very month when the revolutionary crisis according to their plans should have come to a head. "Puppet Magsaysay used the army to allow the Nacionalista candidates to win", they claimed. Another source of irritation was afforded by the rewards placed upon the heads of Party leaders. "They are insulting the pride and honor of Filipinos by offering rewards to traitors for betraying HMB and Communist leaders." Then the ECA (Economic Coordination Administration). "They are pretending that ECA will solve the problems of Filipinos and improve their lives, but this is only propaganda to allow American imperialists to seize even more of our lands, our industries and the rich resources of our country." And the EDCOR (Economic Development Corps). "They are making propaganda about land for the peasants in the puppet Magsaysay's land settlement project in Mindanao which is only a concentration camp run by the Philippine Army." Finally: "On this 10th Anniversary the attention of all loyal Filipino Communists is drawn to China's twenty-three-year struggle against American imperialists and their puppets, Chiang-Kai-Shek and his armies The Filipino people can look to New Democratic China as their best friend and ally."

The Catholic hierarchy comes in for their share of obloquy. They "play a special role in our country as a tool and prop of imperialist-feudalist rule. Our Party must conduct a determined campaign to expose the links

of the Catholic hierarchy with the most oppressive sections of the ruling class, using all cases of incidents in which these links are plainly evident."

A Local Espionage Section was established in every town where there were three "Basic Units." The Basic Unit is composed of three or five men whose duties are "to gather plans, movements of the enemy, the situation of the masses, the secret political agents of the enemy, etc. Agents must *not* know each other." In addition to the provision for espionage, directions were issued for surprise attacks:

Always surprise the enemy Avoid encounters of long duration. The longer the fight lasts the better for the enemy. . . . In ordinary encounters the guerrillas should always outnumber the enemy. However, if the enemy is marching or in bivouac areas, and is careless, the guerrillas should launch an immediate surprise attack on the rear or flanks even though the partisans are outnumbered.

We see from this that the earlier tactics had not been completely abandoned and that along with propaganda warfare the Huk guerrillas were to continue the armed struggle. The purpose however now was different.

LUIS TARUC DECLARATION

About this time Luis Taruc issued a special four-page manifesto treating of *Our Mighty Allies*. This document shows how important the Communists considered American intervention in the East and betrays the Party's fears. "When Truman shouts about sending more arms to puppets in Asia, it is out of desperation, not strength. . . ." In another two-page release, Taruc showed his irritation at Secretary Magsaysay's being declared "man of the year". Taruc insisted that the government's forces were on the defensive and that the HMB were actually gaining the victory. These two releases of Taruc have psychological significance because they were not merely propaganda sheets; rather, they betrayed the Communist leader's own

fears concerning the outcome of the armed struggle. Another source of concern to Taruc was the ECA (Economic Coordination Administration). He found it necessary in March 1952 to issue a four-page diatribe entitled *The Truth About ECA*, declaring that the "tenth anniversary of the HMB comes like the voice of doom to the ECA." That was of course just one of many Taruc prophecies that never came true.

EFFORTS TO BOLSTER MOVEMENT

For any one who could read between the lines, it became evident that Taruc's boastful claim that the HMB was winning the victory was propaganda intended for his comrades, who were becoming fearful of the intensive military and psychological warfare being carried on by the government. Captured documents, intended for more restricted circulation, revealed that

..... the masses, party, and armed forces are seriously demoralized ... Their situation is now comparable to that of a drowning man ... Our soldiers and cadres are surrendering together with their weapons ... Before surrendering they kill some of our comrades ... Even among the officers (HMB) concentration on military studies and work is often distracted, because they have not resigned themselves to make soldiering their profession ... Our organization among the Masses is almost gone, and they (the Masses) are working for the enemy as informers ... The personnel of our units are so few, that they are not even enough for our Courier Posts ... Also their arms are very few ... Our units are like one drop of water in a bucket ... There is a favorable reaction [in HMB quarters] to the government policy of giving rewards and good treatment to surrenderers ... Because of this serious situation the Party and the movement must prepare for a long and desperate war.

Instructions are then given to those who are captured:

Try to escape if possible. Get rid of anything that might incriminate you. If you cannot escape, think of a good alibi and stick to that story. If the enemy has positive proof of

your activities, do not divulge anything that will incriminate others . . . Fight until death. If you are captured, the enemy might kill you. If the enemy does not kill you, your comrades will surely eliminate you.

An *Order and Appeal* issued by the Central Committee of the Party on May 6 gave some more ominous warnings.

We are calling the attention of all heads, from the lowest to the highest unit, not to be disorganized It is also ordered that you refrain from listening to rumors Under the leadership of Sec. Magsaysay, it is not only arms which are used against us by the enemies. They have another deceptive method to poison the minds of the people and our comrades, and to propagate the do-nothing propaganda of the CAO [Civil Affairs Office]. They make tools out of our comrades who surrendered to them So now, comrades, let us have discipline (iron fist discipline) as ordered by our movement, and always bear in mind our basic spirit and military discipline. Give the most severe punishment to whoever will not obey the rules and regulations which should be obeyed by everyone. It is also brought to your attention that you should not forget the strict investigation of those who join our movement. They should not be given arms at once—not until they have been processed, and have given written reasons. At present there are many who are being paid by the government or army to join our movement in order to spy The movement of our enemies is now [May 6, 1952] intense We should not lose hope Don't allow fright and false beliefs in your hearts Let us be united.

The next month a similar *Order—To All Organizing Committees* was issued by the Central Committee warning them not to falter because of “fear, cowardice and wrong belief” because of the government’s propaganda campaign. “Rebels like us should have clear minds, clear understanding and clear thinking Use arms against those hindering our program, whether they be your parents, sisters or brothers, or your children. We have to do this to attain victory.” The *Order* ends with an insistence on handing in “monthly reports” and not unduly delaying them.

A reorganization seems to have taken place around this time and the following items were part of it: Efforts were

to be exerted to secure radio transmitters, wire and other things needed for communication. Membership enrollment among the masses was to be intensified. Depending on the type of membership, dues ran from P1.50 to P5.00. The "Peasant Committee" was required to "get complete data regarding all farmers, tenants and landlords alike." The immediate liquidation of the "imperialist proprietors" was to be initiated. Schools for laborers and peasants were to be opened.

Intensify a united effort to organize the "intellectuals" and professionals Continue the effort to sever the spiritual control of the Church on the Masses Preach to the people and instruct them to boycott elections. Initiate a drive, through purchase or "contact", to secure typewriters and stationery. Each *buklod* [Group] must prepare 3 pairs of shoes and 3 suits of clothes. All confiscated things, like carabaos, should be recorded by the SECOM [Section Commander] No. 1.

The documents just quoted emanated from the highest levels in the Party. But there were other documents emanating from lower levels and manifesting the same propaganda tone of this second period. Such for example were warnings pinned on the bodies of "liquidated spies", or pamphlets and leaflets issued by the National Education Department (NED) of which the ex-American G.I., Pomeroy, was a top official. One of the most interesting of these consists of three pages, evidently written by Pomeroy himself, entitled *Message of One American to Filipinos*, and "written from the depths of your own forests, from the slopes of your own mountains. It is being written from the midst of a struggle that is of your own people, a struggle, that I, an American, have made my struggle, too." The message, according to Pomeroy, is intended mainly for the so-called intellectuals and it grinds out the usual stuff about American imperialism.

Like most other Communist propaganda documents in the Philippines the materials used are crude. This was due, of course, to the limited facilities and the exigencies of jungle and guerrilla existence. Typewritten manifestos

and mimeographed leaflets were about the best literature the Party could produce and these were sufficient for intra-party purposes.

But they were less effective as instruments of outside propaganda since they were difficult to read, easily perishable and from their very appearance suspect.

CHARACTER OF PROPAGANDA RELEASES

Having completed a survey of Communistic propaganda in the Philippines during the two phases through which it passed between January 1951 and January 1953 we are now in a position to point out certain characteristics of Communist propaganda method in general.

Some of the propaganda issues employed by the Communists are of permanent value to the Party and are therefore constantly in use. Such for example is the charge of a military dictatorship, by which they meet the effort of the law enforcement agencies to suppress their revolt. Other propaganda items, however, are born of passing events and situations, such as the amnesty manifesto. Many of these occasional efforts are very ingeniously launched and excellently timed. Of this variety were the attacks on the MSA aid and on the budget, when these things were subjects of daily discussion among the people.

In the 1951 elections the Communists directed their propaganda at the candidates, asking: "After being elected, do you feel that you can exercise the power of your elective office?" In another letter to teachers and government employees of Luzon, the Communists asked, in effect, "Now that you yourselves crave a progressive and prosperous Philippines, why don't you join the Communist revolution?" The letter then outlined the Party's "minimum program" of social and economic reform.

One characteristic of Communistic propaganda, illustrated in the preceding two examples, is that it always has a specific audience in mind, and that it is careful to mention this audience. Nevertheless the propaganda never

loses sight of the fact that its ultimate goal always remains the people.

At the present time Communistic propaganda has for its purpose to implement the current objective, that is to turn the "ebbing revolutionary consciousness." Unless the Communists can count on the support of the people (what they call the "mass base") and unless they are convinced that the strength of the "main force" (i.e. the Communists themselves and the HMB) is capable of carrying out a winning effort, they will not launch a full-scale revolution. Current Communist revolutionary activity therefore resembles much the cold war going on in the rest of the world today. The mission of the party's propaganda is, in its contemporary effort, confined to winning ascendancy over the minds of the people. The revolution must wait.

In their propaganda the Communists show great ingenuity in securing needed facts and data. Moreover they are experienced hands in the use of agitational phrases, and know well the value of such psychological factors as patriotism, desire for land, job opportunities and economic stability, and are expert in the employment of fear, or intimidation, and even of religious motives.

A piece of propaganda generally follows a set pattern. It begins with a thesis or issue, as for example, that the country is under control of a military dictatorship. This launches the attack. The thesis is then followed by an appeal to one of the psychological factors or motives just mentioned. For example, the factor or motive in this case might be patriotism. Then the Communistic stand is expounded vis-a-vis this issue, for example by asserting that Communism is by contrast a rule of the people. Lines of action by which the Communist solution can be realized are then promised. And finally the whole ends with "clinchers", usually catchy slogans designed to catalyze the audience into action.

STRATEGY FOR 1953

The strategy for the year 1953 was outlined by Dr. Jesus Lava, Executive Secretary of the Central Committee,

in a directive entitled *The Party's Political, Economic, Military Aims for the Coming Year*. It was dated July 7, 1952. It begins with the statement: "The movement enters its crucial period in its gigantic battle to liberate the country" And continues: "We should place emphasis on all-out ambushing, barrio raids, *dukot* [kidnapping], etc. and continuously harass the QLP [Quirino Liberal Party] administered government and the unbelievers in the cause."

A campaign for the allegiance of young people is asked for, especially among students. Finally, workers' organizations are called for, especially in transportation companies, among conductors, drivers, *cargadores* and small transportation operators. This is in line with the strategy being adopted in the United States, where the complaint has been that the Party had lost its hold on labor unions.

What has been the effectiveness of Communist propaganda in the Philippines? Its effectiveness is relative. Where such propaganda is obviously exaggerated or far-fetched as in the assertion that the 1950 elections were invalid or the claim that EDCOR is a military concentration camp, the propaganda falls flat. Where, however, it cites facts (there are, unfortunately, only too many yet) of government neglect, corruption and the like, the propaganda finds a disturbing reception in its intended audience. These facts become springboards for Communist agitation, which is quick to draw the wrong conclusion from cunningly arranged premises.

The weakness of enemy propaganda, however, is fundamental: it is on the wrong side. It has to sell a twisted truth, a warped idea. Its appeal may hold a temporary fascination but it is vulnerable to counter measures. When a bewitched audience is freed from the temporary fascination, usually it is forever immune to further enemy propaganda. The weapon against falsehood is always truth. How to expose falsehood and how to clarify truth is the technique, not always easy, of the informational and psychological warfare carried on by the Department of National Defense.