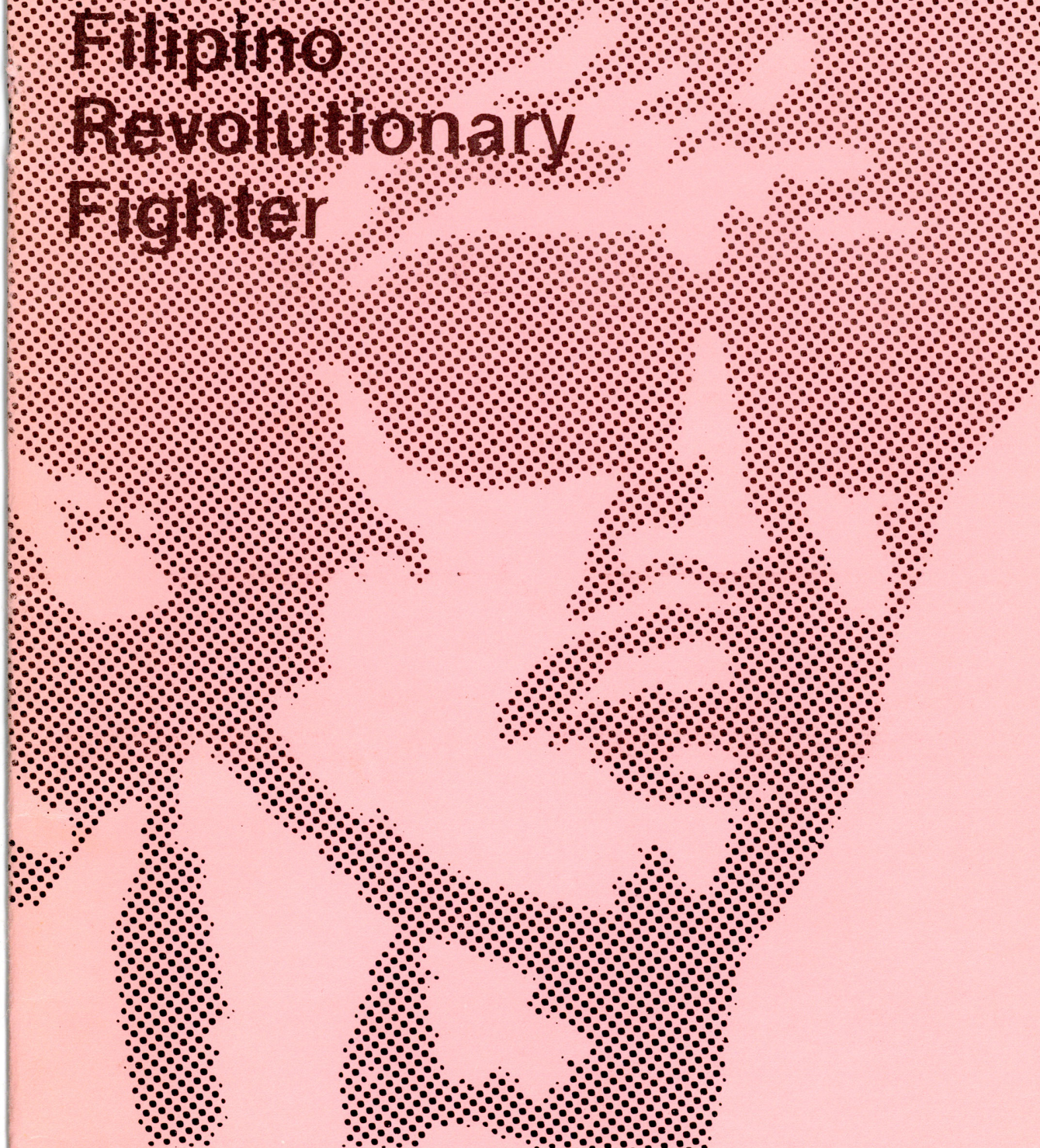


José María Sison: Filipino Revolutionary Fighter



Prepared by the
ALLIANCE FOR PHILIPPINE NATIONAL DEMOCRACY
(UGNAYAN PARA SA PAMBANSANG
DEMOKRASYA SA PILIPINAS)

JOSE MARIA SISON: FILIPINO REVOLUTIONARY FIGHTER

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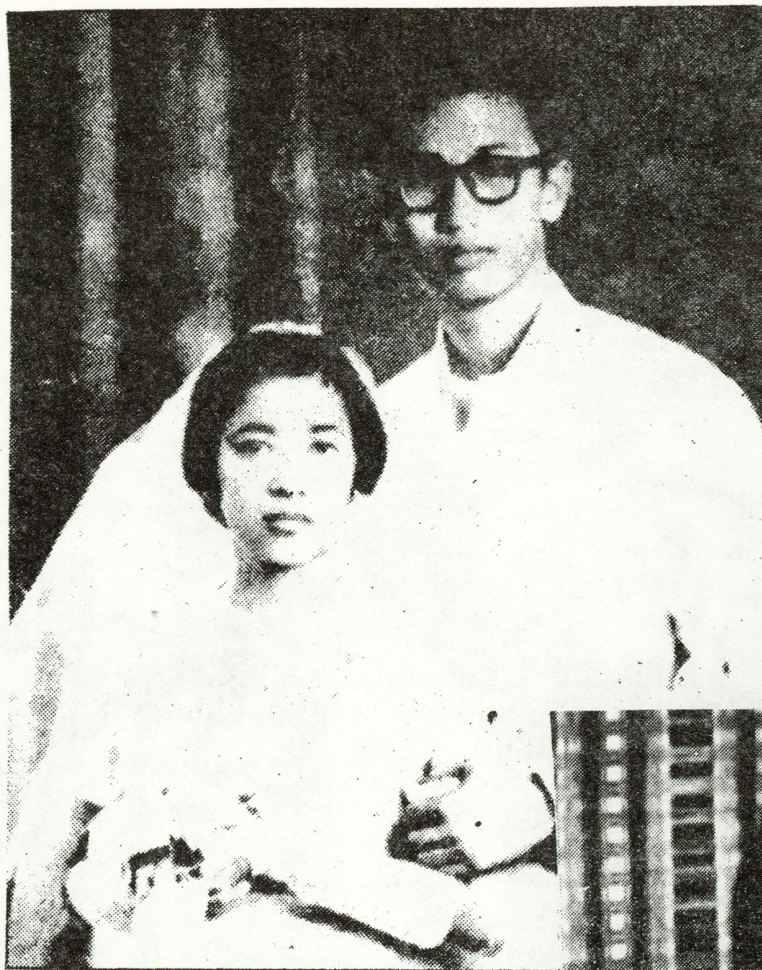
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Juliet de Lima Sison



Free José María Sison!

— *Felix Razon*

“You can imprison a revolutionary, but not the revolution.” This saying encapsulates in memorable form the current thrust of the struggle to affirm and defend the people’s rights in the Philippines.

This struggle centers on about 6,000 political prisoners, and on one prisoner in particular whom the Marcos dictatorship identifies as the “head” of the nationwide resistance — José María Sison.

Sison is alleged to be Amado Guerrero, chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines, which is guided by Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought. The Party today spearheads the raging people’s war against U.S. imperialism and its local henchmen.

With Sison’s capture on November 10, 1977, the Marcos dictatorship announced the demise of the Communist Party and the collapse of its military arm, the New People’s Army.

Such propaganda turned out to be hopelessly premature. The Marcos regime came to realize that the revolution’s motor force is the united energies of the masses, not single individuals.

In 1977 and April-May of 1979, the New People’s Army demonstrated its phenomenal accumulation of strength and support by occupying several towns on the island of Samar. This is an unprecedented feat, owing largely to the theoretical guidance and practical leadership that Sison has provided to the movement since the early 1960’s up to his arrest in November 1977.

Although the Marcos military claims to have killed or arrested 20 of the 26 members of the Central Committee of the Party, the underground has reported that in April 1978, a completely reorganized Central Committee met for its fourth plenum.

Sison — a great revolutionary

Why was Sison considered by the U.S.-Marcos dictatorship as “the Philippines’ most wanted man”?

Primarily because it was Sison who, together with other comrades,

reversed the revisionist course of the vanguard party of the Filipino working class and reestablished it on Marxist-Leninist principles. The Soviet-inspired revisionists later on surrendered to Marcos and at present serve his bureaucratic machine.

In 1964, after decades of repression of the left, Sison founded the Kabataang Makabayan (Nationalist Youth) which sparked the fires of a deep, ongoing cultural revolution among students, intellectuals and the middle strata of 45 million Filipinos.

In the years 1964-1968, as General Secretary of the Movement for the Advancement of Nationalism (MAN) and one of the leaders of the Workers Party, Sison concentrated his efforts into transforming what he called then "the idea of the national democratic revolution . . . into a material force."

Sison was instrumental in reorganizing the Communist Party of the Philippines on December 26, 1968, on the basis of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought.

The two documents that crystallize the complex ideological and political conflicts underlying such a historical movement are: *Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party* (1968), a party document; and *Philippine Society and Revolution* (1972), by Amado Guerrero. This latter book has become a primer for Marxist-Leninists in the Philippines and, with appropriate modifications, in other parts of the third world. A summing up of the experience by Amado Guerrero since 1972 was published in *Specific Characteristics of Our People's War* (1974).

On March 29, 1969, the New People's Army was formed by the Party, signaling the onset of protracted people's war against U.S. imperialism and its three class allies in the Philippines: the feudal landlords, compradors and bureaucrat-capitalists now temporarily led by the Marcos clique.

It is to Sison's credit that those decisive qualitative leaps in the Philippine revolution occurred. He applied materialist dialectics (the concrete analysis of concrete conditions) to Philippine society. This enabled cadre, progressive militants and other anti-imperialist forces to engage in class analysis, distinguish friends and enemies, and form a broad united front using all means necessary to isolate the enemy and focus the people's forces against it.

Sison's imprisonment

Because of these tremendous gains which the enemy attributes to him, Sison has experienced severe physical and mental torture since his capture. Isolated in his detention cell, separated from his wife,

Juliet de Lima-Sison (also a political prisoner), with feet and hands manacled to his bed, Sison has so far survived.

In a statement issued March 13, 1979, as his case was scheduled for a hearing before the Philippine Supreme Court, Sison described his harrowing experiences as a political prisoner. His case epitomizes the plight of thousands of political prisoners (70,000 since martial law was declared in 1972). Marcos' violation of the people's rights has become a celebrated example, heavily indicted by world opinion, as represented by Amnesty International, the World Commission of Jurists, National Council of Churches, and so on.

Sison's imprisonment at the maximum security stockade of the Philippine Army Military Security Unit at Fort Bonafacio near Manila has been extremely long and harsh, even compared to other prisoners.

Because Sison is viewed to be the living symbol of the nationalist and anti-imperialist resistance, he has been marked for "salvaging" — Marcos' policy of unofficial execution or assassination of "subversives."

Of course, Sison is more than a symbol of massive opposition to the martial law regime. He is the living historic personality who embodies the profound needs and long-range aspirations of the Filipino people for freedom, sovereignty, genuine independence — the struggle for national democracy and national liberation.

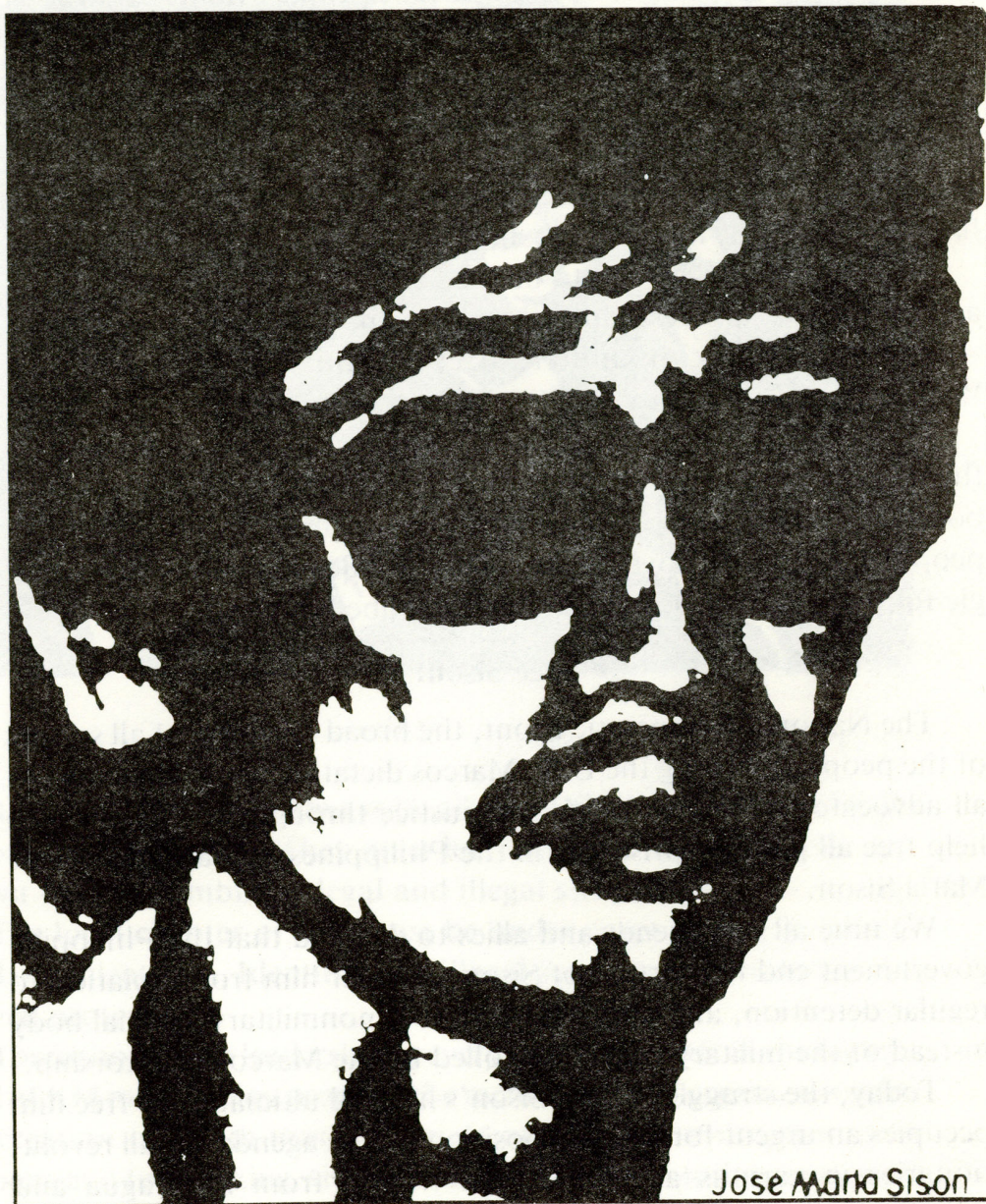
Free Sison!

The National Democratic Front, the broad coalition of all sectors of the people opposing the U.S.-Marcos dictatorship, is appealing to all advocates of human rights and justice throughout the world to help free all political prisoners in the Philippines, in particular, José Maria Sison.

We urge all our friends and allies to demand that the Philippine government end the torture of Sison, transfer him from isolation to regular detention, and assign his case to a nonmilitary judicial body instead of the military court controlled by the Marcos dictatorship.

Today, the struggle to save Sison's life and ultimately to free him occupies an urgent foreground position on the agenda for all revolutionaries in various anti-imperialist fronts, from Nicaragua and Palestine to Kampuchea.

Who is José María Sison?



No political detainee in the Philippines today, notes a religious group monitoring human rights violations, has been subjected to such restrictive measures and so consistently denied his basic human rights,

as José María Sison. And for that matter his wife, Juliet de Lima-Sison. Both are detained in separate solitary confinement cells in a military camp, not being able to see or talk to each other.

Together with his wife and three friends, Sison was arrested by Marcos agents on November 10, 1977. The regime then declared that it had captured the "Philippines' most wanted man" and that Sison was none other than Amado Guerrero, chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

Right after his arrest and after a brief confrontation with Dictator Marcos, Sison was subjected to severe torture and other forms of degrading and inhumane punishment. Failing to break his spirit, the military shackled Sison to his cot for more than seven months, denied him contact with lawyers and relatives, deprived him of simple amenities such as reading material, eyeglasses, sunlight or exercise. His small detention cell has no windows; it is like an oven during hot days and nights, and like a freezer during cold nights.

When allowed to see a lawyer as charges of rebellion and subversion against him were pressed by military prosecutors, Sison seized the opportunity to expose gross violations of his basic human and constitutional rights. As to be expected, his attempts to speak before military courts were suppressed. He and his co-accused filed petitions for habeas corpus before the Supreme Court where he also has not yet been allowed to speak.

However, copies of Sison's statement for the Supreme Court were released by his lawyer. Only in this way did Sison get the chance to be heard. As *Political Detainees Update* (October 15, 1979) put it: "Sison spared no word to describe his ordeal but every sentence was sober, weighty. Joma also restated his abiding commitment to the people — to fight for their interests, to live and die by them."

At 40, Sison, or Joma as he is affectionately called in the resistance, is best known as a political leader. But he is also a poet, critic, and a historian. As a student and then as faculty member at the University of the Philippines, Sison published poetry which included *Birds of Prey*, written at the height of the U.S. military buildup in Viet Nam in 1966. However, his historical writing has exerted greater influence. In one of his works, *Struggle for National Democracy* (1967), Sison revolutionized Philippine historical scholarship. Sison's effectiveness, notes Filipino historian Teodor Agoncillo, "derives from his broad, progressive outlook, but also from his analytic method, his grasp of the historical significance of events and mass movements, and more importantly from his direct involvement in

political mass actions.”

After a brief research stint in Indonesia in the early sixties, he returned to the Philippines to work with other progressives from labor, the nationalist bourgeoisie, and the student sector. He led in the establishment of a number of patriotic organizations, foremost of which was Kabataang Makabayan (KM) or Nationalist Youth, founded in 1964. He also acted as General Secretary of the Movement for the Advancement of Nationalism (MAN) and Vice-President of Lapiang Manggagawa or Workers Party.

As Sison saw it, the underdevelopment of the country stemmed from two related conditions: the antiquated feudal relations of production, predominant in Philippine agriculture, and the massive economic and military presence of the United States. The task of all patriotic Filipinos, therefore, was to participate in the forging of a mass movement around a program for national democracy.

In a 1966 speech, Sison described national democracy as a “necessary state in the struggle of our people for social justice, whereby the freedom of the entire nation is first secured so that the nation-state that has been secured would allow within its framework the masses of Filipinos to enjoy the democratic rights to achieve their social emancipation.”

Being the leader of the growing national democratic movement, Sison was a marked man. He was subjected to arrest, harassment and assassination attempts. He had no choice but to go underground in 1968.

In his *Statement for the Supreme Court*, Sison says that his ordeal is nothing in comparison to the torture and murder as well as massacre of thousands of revolutionary martyrs. With this awareness, he is determined to keep on fighting and is prepared to undergo further fascist brutality until his tormentors decide to finally kill him.

— by Association of Progressive Filipinos
Box 314, P.A.I. Post Office
Montreal, Quebec H1B 5K4 Canada
(The APF is a founding member of Ugnayan)

José María Sison: Poet of resistance and people's war

—By *E. San Juan, Jr.*

For over a dozen years now, and most fanatically since the blitzkrieg imposition of martial law by the authoritarian regime of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, one person has obsessed the coercive agencies of the Establishment. This person is José María Sison. Why?

Arrested in November 1977, Sison is now confined to a dungeon, not a medieval one but a modern, maximum-security cell in a military camp outside Manila, the capital city. Except when eating, Sison's hands and feet are manacled, chained to a post. He has been kept strictly incommunicado for several months now — to be exact, two years.

For two years now, Sison has been allowed only one reading material, the Bible, long parts of which he has memorized. At present, though his case has been given preliminary hearings before the Marcos-appointed military tribunal, he is only allowed sporadic and monitored visits by his lawyer and his mother. He has never seen his wife, Juliet de Lima-Sison, who was arrested with him and also kept incommunicado ever since.

Like seventy thousand political prisoners (since 1972 when martial law was declared), as documented by Amnesty International, the International Commission of Jurists and other world organizations, Sison and his wife have been intolerably brutalized by the Marcos dictatorship whose violations of human rights have been condemned by the agencies I have mentioned, as well as by the U.S. State Department, the World Council of Churches, Association of Major Religious Superiors in the Philippines, and so forth.

Given Sison's solitary confinement, the non-stop torture inflicted on him, and his status as prime candidate for "salvaging," the unofficial policy of execution of political dissidents by the Marcos security

forces, world consensus agrees with the opinion of one Filipino lawyer who described Sison's condition as "the worst thus far accorded a prisoner." With this judgment, Senator Benigno Aquino, the leading Establishment politician detained by Marcos, concurs.

Guilty until proven innocent

Sison's extremely vulnerable and precarious condition may be attributed to the fact that the government accuses him of being the legendary Amado Guerrero, chairman of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Philippines, and author of *Philippine Society and Revolution* (1972), the path-breaking Marxist analysis of the political crisis and social contradictions exploding in the once acclaimed "showcase of U.S. democracy in Asia," the Philippines.

Sison's identity, however, cannot be confirmed simply by legalese and bureaucratic terms reflective of the mechanical, abstract and technocratic world-view of his persecutors. To do so is to surrender the freedom of inquiry and the latitude of discourse to those who command a monopoly of power. Unknowingly, this is what Sison's enemies — judge, witness and prosecutor combined — have done. For that reason, Sison has already escaped from them (in a manner of speaking) and has affirmed his self-liberation from the dogmatic, corrupt and dehumanizing system of his victimizers. Such is the dialectic of oppressed and oppressor that we are all witnessing today in most third world countries.

Sison's identity as a subversive intellectual can be captured in his poems, the synthesis and distillation of his ideas and arguments expressed in his prose writings, speeches, etc. His poems serve as incontrovertible material exhibits not for his innocence but for his "guilt" — as exemplary freedom-fighter, an authentic partisan for democratic rights and social justice, an intransigent revolutionary.

What impelled Sison to be a revolutionary? Son of a small landlord family, educated at the University of the Philippines and professor of political science there and at Lyceum University, why did Sison forsake a life of comfort and relative affluence? We can discern patterns of motivation, emblems of purpose inscribed in the signifying texture and design of his poems.

Who is speaking to us?

The privileged insight informing Sison's imagination is the vision of life as the lived process of dynamic contradictions. While Sison recognizes his physical bondage, for example, he refuses at the same

time to accept its permanence, shown in a poem which begins: "So you're kept shackled and chained!" Pain and anger coalesce in his mind; his wrath "burns, burns, burns! . . . / I can laugh at the powers . . . / Who prove themselves unworthy / Of their humanity."

Sison projects the existential situation of the rebel as a process of interlocking opposites, a unity of contraries. Any circumstance or event is perceived as a manifold of conflicting tendencies that necessarily and inevitably bifurcates into two phases. First, we have the given state of lack, privation, denial; and second, the opposite process which it begets, the annulment or a canceling of the original lack. In one poem, Sison proposes a parallel between the "dark depths of prison" and the "dark depths of earth" where "shining gold is mined." The analogy of labor and production is pursued to the point where depths of sea and earth coincide with "character," the outcome of the unrelenting work of transforming society by the consciously willed cooperation of committed persons:

*And the shining pearl is dived
From the dark depths of the sea.
We suffer but we endure
And draw up gold and pearl
From depths of character
Formed for so long in struggle.*

(In the Dark Depths)

In another poem, *A Furnace*, prison during December nights acts like a freezer, while in summer it serves as an infernal torture-chamber. By virtue of metaphoric substitution, the prisoner transvaluates the otherwise cyclic, meaningless trajectory of his suffering: the cell is "a seething furnace / For tempering steel / And purifying gold."

The necessary interaction of opposites is once more dramatized in *Rain and Sun On the Mountains*. Behind the terror of lightning and thunder, "Rain soaks the earth . . . / And pours life into the creeks and rivers." Even amid the ravaging impact of winds, the poet perceives plants and crops receiving "deepgoing nourishment." This all-encompassing vision of the symbiotic or mutually interdependent relations in nature — rain and sun alternating to sustain the organic beauty and exuberance of life — is crystallized thus:

*Grasping the long-term rhythm of the seasons,
Their testiness and cumulative grace,
The mountains maintain their majesty
And proclaim their mastery over calamity.*

In another poem, *The Coming of Rain*, "oppressive heat" and "dark heavy clouds" explode into thunder and lightning interpreted as harbingers of "A new season of growth." A submerged correspondence is initiated between armed revolutionaries based in the mountains and the "deepening stream bounding from the mountains to the plains." Again, the inexorable rhythm of seasonal growth and decay is harnessed to reinforce the prophetic or utopian impulse that vitalizes Sison's linguistic practice.

*The wind sweeps away the fallen leaves
And fans the spark on the stubbly fields
The flames leap and whet the thrust
Of the earth so eager for the water thrusts.*

But life is not a natural phenomenon governed by implacable laws; it is, for Sison and other third world militants like Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, Aimé Césaire, Ngugi, etc., a project shaped by, and shaping, history. The solidarity of human wills, the fusion of participating subjects in organized action, intervenes in the world to create the groundwork for the future: a new society and culture that is genuinely popular, democratic, libertarian. Hence, the thrust of an apocalyptic sensibility may be discerned in Sison's writings as the point of departure, the staging arena for analysis and resolution. This is explainable in part by Sison's being condemned to read nothing except the Bible in his cell, as I noted earlier.

Modernizing fables

We are all familiar with the mythical archetype of the hero vanquishing the diabolical dragon, the leviathan which exacts periodic sacrificial offerings from the community. In allegorical terms, Sison plots the destruction of the exploitative landlord class primarily, and their allies, in *Against the Monster On the Land*, armed with "brittle rusty sword" and "casting a spell with a cross" — an obvious allusion to one of the big conservative landlords in the Philippines, the institution of the Catholic Church.

Battered by the shrewd attacks of peasants, the monster is trapped in a hole and scorched by flaming oil: "The night shall flee from the

flames./ These shall rage until the break of day/ And merge with the glory of the sun." The "children of the soil" and "of toil" will celebrate this advent of a new, non-violent, festive order that releases the creative and fertilizing energies of humans who, by their collective labor, are spontaneously wedded to nature. The monster's "sword shall break by a hammer blow/ On a rock from which a sweet spring flows."

In *From A Burning Bush*, Sison uses Biblical motifs and imagery to express the people's unleashed rage against the gods of the exploiters — feudalism, bureaucrat-capitalism, and imperialism, holed up in "the tower of idols." Popular clamor mobilizes a tumultuous multitude of "burning bushes," thus democratizing the otherwise elitist persona of the divine agency:

*Lightnings smite the tower of idols.
The flying scrolls enter the apertures
And invite the flames from the stubble
To close in on the roots of the tower.*

Given the ironic and often paradoxical character of historic crisis, the poet does not limit himself to a documentary or one-dimensional transcript of circumstances and problems. To do so would be to opt for a mechanistic determinism alien to Sison's project for the education and mobilization of the working people. Such determinism, as I suggested earlier, characterizes the policy and mentality of his persecutors.

Partly to obviate censorship imposed by military security forces, Sison chooses an allegorical mode in *The Woman and the Strange Eagle*. The narrative framework is a voyage in which a pregnant woman and her companions are threatened by an eagle that "shuts out the sun," with "talons of steel dripping with blood." The eagle-symbolism is fairly transparent; it stands for predatory U.S. economic and political domination over its neocolony. With the eagle's thwarting assured, the voyagers assert:

*We know our seas and islands well.
Our will is firm and we know the way
The landward east wind is in our favor;
We cannot get lost in our labor.
Look at how the red sail is blown
And how the red lamp glows in gathering storm.
We shall surely reach our port.*

The traveler's quest will culminate in a birth:

*The child of darkness and the tempest,
The child of this suffering woman
Shall be born in a strong house
Well-lighted and firm in the ground.
Her pangs shall be her joy without bounds.*

The last line, connecting the travail of nativity with what the poet in the conclusion calls "a joyous day of victory for all our kindred," emphasizes again Sison's all-inclusive but also differentiating sensibility.

Sison's role as an artist, together with his perception of the responsibility entailed by this vocation in a third world society, is not simply geared toward unifying and reconciling antagonistic forces. That would be spurious problem-solving, harmonizing the conflicting interests of slave-owner and slave. Rather, Sison's art strives to unfold the endless sequence of ruptures and dichotomies in the adventure of our private and public lives. Simultaneously, it is a bridging of fissures and cleavages by elevating our consciousness to a higher stage of development. What is thus constituted in a formally defined process, as exhibited by the logic of poetic symbolism, is therefore a heterogeneous whole where contradictions exist in a suspended state of tension. To illustrate briefly: Amid the birth of the child (associated with nature's abundance), the poet recalls the rapacious eagle, the accursed bird of prey. This antithesis, or if you like, polarized imagery, can be considered the organizing principle of the poem.

We are all Prometheus

In the poem *I Have Walked Mazes of Pain*, Sison invokes Prometheus' predicament as a model. Like this legendary firebringer, the poet rejects despair because "Others have suffered my fate" in their struggle against injustice and oppression. The poet aims for the abolition of the rule of a privileged minority class over the majority of deprived workers and peasants.

Preyed on by vultures, Prometheus did not despair because he had the vision that the people, having gained "knowledge and power," would banish the vindictive, tyrannical gods. The poet assigns the Promethean destiny of ultimate transcendence or liberation to each freedom-fighter who sacrifices for a larger collective good which ultimately promotes individual fulfillment within the framework of egalitarian social relations:

*For what is my pain
Compared to that of deprived millions!
Prometheus lives in every man
Who ever seeks great knowledge and freedom,
The gods die and are forgotten.*

Anticipating the obscurantist ideology which often gravitates around the Prometheus myth, an ideology of the cult of the super-human messiah, Sison foils the habitual expectation of glorifying the extraordinary individual. He performs a dialectical transformation of the Promethean complex and thereby exorcises the individualist syndrome of corporate, liberal society based on the cash-nexus and profit-making. In effect, the demiurgic power of the imagination is seen to reside in every human rebelling against a repressive status quo.

One must take sides

Wisdom, for Sison, derives from the comprehension of those forces which define and determine the nature and direction of our daily lives. It springs from a lucid grasp of the reasons why humans commit themselves to a cause that transcends mere personal comfort or worldly advantage. In *Wisdom From A Comrade*, Sison describes vividly the coalescence of grief and exultation as a comrade assuages the despondent sweetheart of a slain guerrilla fighter: "I am also sad / But I am happy too and proud of him / For he was to the end a revolutionary / And nothing can ever change that."

What defines the essence of a person's life? Confronted with diverse circumstances of one's death — whether by accident, old age, disease, or combat — could one penetrate and unfold the meaning behind the accidents and arbitrary contingencies of immediate experience?

Sison points out that there is no metaphysical essence or buried core of meaning that one can dredge up from the innermost layers of the unconscious. A person is the sum of his deeds. Instead, in the poem *What Makes A Hero*, Sison envisages a structure of human relations that identify character, the essential substance of a person's life. It is not the manner of death "that signifies the worth of one's life," rather "it is the meaning drawn / From the struggles against the foe." It is the process of serving the people "To his very last breath" that generates the category of value, of existential worth.

Sison, however, focuses on the conjunctures, the crucibles of one's life, that test and measure human possibilities and limits. The

privileged sites for this testing in the Philippines today, as in many third world societies, are the battlefields and the torture cells: "In these bloody places./ The struggle is sharpest/ And the meaning of one's life/ Is tested in one crucial moment." But this does not imply an ethics of personal salvation, or "self-actualization," which glorifies martyrdom and death for their own sakes. Sison lacks any penchant for Sartrean anguish or Heideggerian nihilism. His paradigm is the selfless conduct of a Ho Chi Minh whose sufferings in prison serve as the touchstone, the synthesizing matrix which engenders the possibilities for individual regeneration and social renewal. This is aptly conveyed in the parallelism of the seasons and the vicissitudes of the human spirit, in the contradictory but also complementary motions of physical restriction in prison and the boundary-shattering insurgency of the masses. The poet interweaves diverse motifs in one thematic formulation, linking the harvest of rice and their processing with the celebration of the people's struggle for freedom and beauty — this last being a bold affirmation of Sison's concept of revolutionary praxis:

*The movement was on the rise
When he was put behind bars.
As he sang of the grain of rice
Made pearl white, he never lost touch.*

*I think of all the reasons
That in due time I shall be out.
I am sure that the passage of seasons
Will further shed from victory any doubt.*

*Meanwhile, there's nothing more beautiful
Than to sing songs of freedom,
Songs of the people's struggle,
To fight tyranny and boredom. (Nothing More Beautiful)*

Toward a discourse of emancipation

For Sison, prison is a transitory if tormenting stage in the adventure of hope and national redemption for the Filipino people. The cool breeze that penetrates his prison cell caresses and kisses, renewing spiritual resources incarnated in his body, abolishing the barriers between outside and inside in the course of a sustained struggle for freedom not just for himself but (and this might sound banal or incredibly pious) also for his blind captors, victims of the same system which reifies everything human. The breeze restores first the sup-

pressed functions of the body, and then establishes communication:

*The breeze carries the scent of the red flowers,
It is part of the great irresistible wind
Of struggle sweeping all the islands.
Everywhere the message is to fight and win.*

(A Cool Breeze)

The “breeze” is the signifying vehicle that reveals the truth concealed by an iniquitous, colonized power-structure: social wealth is the product of collective labor.

By foregrounding the historical development of society and integrating knowledge and technology with the non-private resources afforded by nature, Sison avoids the pitfall of romantic sentimentalism to which nature poets are traditionally susceptible. He executes the demystifying gesture in *The Central Plains*:

*The breeze sweeping the plains carries
The rhythm of toil of peasants and farm workers.
I love the clangor on the road and in shops
As workers make do with some machines.
I love the blue mountains yonder;
They evince hope to all the toilers.*

Sison’s destination upon his capture — a fetid, dark contemporary dungeon — is surely not his destiny as a writer. Since Pascal and Montaigne, two uncompromising humanists who articulated the ambiguous self-consciousness of the European Renaissance as it evolved into the Age of Enlightenment and Revolution, imprisonment has become the paradigm, the parabolic equivalent, of the human condition. How many activist intellectuals — from, say, Cervantes to Gandhi, Gramsci, Jean Genet, Malcolm X, George Jackson, not to forget the Attica Prison multinational collective of writers — have had their imagination catalyzed and fertilized by prison ordeals? (Not that prison, then, should be recommended for anyone aspiring to “self-actualization,” as the fashionable individualism of present-day U.S. society would put it.)

It is because prison conditions represent the sharpest contradiction between the conscious, desiring body and the petrified or inert structures of society that for Sison and millions of political prisoners throughout the world, their imprisonment dramatizes the profoundly experienced alienation of most people in a business or market-oriented civilization.

Ironically, however, physical confinement of writers and intellectuals incites their minds to a turbulent and seething creative revolt. Hence the need for constant objectification of energies in patterned language, in the synthesizing virtues of symbolic action. Sison descants: "A spirit as active and free as mine/ Can never be entombed in a cell." A platitude, of course, straight out of literary convention; but also, in the context of the raging fires of people's war in the Philippines, a provocative and inflammatory challenge to the hangmen in their grey flannel suits.

A modest appeal

In conclusion, I would like to call on all committed writers and intellectuals throughout the world to demand the termination of Sison's torture and cruel confinement.

If you believe in the living, concrete sanctity of human rights not just as a pretext for diplomatic policy but truly as a fundamental principle inherent in the critical or conscientizing function of art and literature, please urge the Marcos government to allow Sison the exercise of his civil and constitutional rights: the right to a fair trial, the right to live by the dictates of his conscience. I think this is the least one can do on behalf of 46 million Filipinos for whose dignity, independence, and freedom Sison and others today are fighting.

