

Sison Behind Bars

JOSE MARIA SISON DOES NOT need any introduction to the communist revolutionaries of India. Being the founding chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and one of the most ardent campaigners of Mao's thoughts, he once made his presence felt in the international communist movement. Having spent almost 9 years in Ferdinand Manco's prison in the Philippines from 1977 to 1980, he finally began to live in the Netherlands as a political refugee. He has been there since 1987, working hard to negotiate peace process between the Philippine government and underground democratic movements represented by National Democratic Front of Philippines (NDFP). And currently Sison is the senior political consultant of NDFP. It's simply a democratic exercise, having no track with 'violence' and 'terrorism'. But suddenly the Dutch authorities have arrested him on false charges of planned murder of two Filipinos in 2003 and 2004, possibly at the instance of Uncle Sam.

The hard reality is that Sison has long lost any position of active or direct involvement in the leadership of the Philippine revolutionary movement, although he is still held in high esteem by the entire Philippine people's movement, democrats and progressives, by leading personalities of various persuasions, nationally and internationally.

Sison will now be put on trial in the Netherlands, on trumped-up charges. But the real reasons for his arrest are political, not criminal. The United States and the Philippine government have been trying to silence Sison, one of the most influential and vocal critics of the Arroyo government, for many years and by any means. He has been the target of character assassination and judicial measures, impinging on his refugee status. He was labelled a 'terrorist', along with the NPA and the CPP, by the US, the European Union and the Netherlands, after Washington declared its so-called 'global war on terror' in 2001.

It is ironic that police and judicial action is taken against Jose Maria Sison, himself a long-time victim of political repression and a long-time champion of the cause of a just and lasting peace in the Philippines, while the US-backed Arroyo government continues its campaign of blanket political killings against leaders and activists of the people's movement in the Philippines with impunity, a campaign that has claimed over 850 innocent lives since 2001.

The move of the Dutch authorities against Jose Maria Sison does not bode well for the democratic rights of progressives and revolutionaries in Europe, which have come under increased attack over the past few years, in line with America's so-called 'war on terror'. The arrest and detention of Sison hamper rather than help the resumption of peace talks between the NDFP and the Philippine government. □□□