

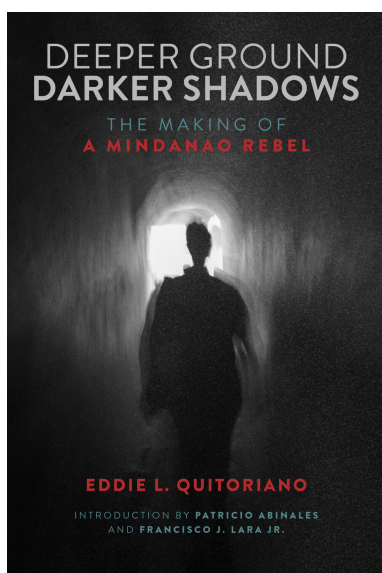
<https://internationalviewpoint.org/Searching-for-international-solidarity>



Philippines - review

Searching for international solidarity

- Reviews section -



Publication date: Friday 1 May 2026

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

Deeper Grounds, Darker Shadows [1] is the remarkable memoir of Eddie L. Quitariano, a Filipino revolutionary who traveled across four different continents to find support for the struggle in his home-country. A book filled with stories of subterfuge and encounters with outlaws and dictators, it sheds new light on the [history of the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines \(CPP\)](#) and the limitations of its revolutionary strategy.

Starting in 1986, for around eight years Quitariano's revolutionary work was essentially that of an international networker. After moving out of the Philippines, Quitariano was based largely in a safe house in Belgrade, in former Yugoslavia. Attempting to find support for the CPP, he visited a large number of countries, including Nicaragua, Syria, North-Korea and Cuba.

Comrades from Japan

One of the surprising revelations made by Quitariano concerns the extent of his cooperation with the Japanese Red Army (JRA), and its leader [Fusako Shigenobu](#). The JRA is today best known for the 1972 Lod attack when three JRA members opened fire on people in the waiting area of what is now Ben Gurion International Airport. The attack was carried out in cooperation with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and this cooperation of [Japanese and Palestinian militants](#) drew considerable attention. But since 2001, when Shigenobu announced the dissolving of the JRA from prison, the organisation had largely been forgotten.

One could wonder what the JRA had to offer the CPP. The JRA was an "urban guerilla group" with at most dozens of members. The CPP, when it was at its height in the 1980s, was a movement with tens of thousands of cadres and a mass base numbering in the millions. Its armed wing, the New People's Army or NPA had thousands of full-time combatants and could mobilize many thousands more in its militia.

But the JRA could offer international contacts, and this is what the CPP was lacking. Founded in 1968, the CPP declared it was "very fortunate" to be close to China, the "iron bastion of socialism." But after the CPP, in the early 1970s, botched attempts to ship weapons to the NPA from China, material support ceased and by the mid-1980s the Chinese government was referring to Filipino dictator Ferdinand Marcos as an "old friend." Just when the CPP seemed to become a serious contender for power, it found itself isolated internationally.

In April 1986, Quitariano met Shigenobu in an apartment in Manila where she offered to help in establishing international contacts. It was the JRA who initiated the relationship with the CPP, through a member of a Japanese solidarity group. It was largely because of the support of the JRA and Fusako Shigenobu that Quitariano could play the role of international emissary for the CPP. Shigenobu supplied Quitariano with forged documents, cash, practical advice and contacts. The way that Quitariano tells the story, the JRA had decided to shift from undertaking armed attacks to focus on facilitating international links between armed groups in the service of "world revolution."

Only months before this meeting, in February 1986, Ferdinand Marcos had been overthrown in a popular uprising. This followed years of a deepening crisis of the regime after the 1983 assassination of Benigno Aquino, a leader of the bourgeois opposition. This crisis of the Marcos regime opened up new possibilities for growth of the CPP.

The myth of people's war

To understand Quitariano's international travels one needs to consider the CPP's strategy of "protracted people's war." The [PPW was supposed to be structured in three stages](#). It would start with small armed propaganda squads in the countryside and limited hit-and-run attacks. Gradually and systematically the NPA would organize support and recruit fighters to "accumulate the strength to win bigger battles and campaigns to be able to move up to a higher stage of the war." In this second stage, "the strategic stalemate", the NPA would incorporate elements of regular warfare and its "strength shall be more or less on an equal footing with the enemy's." The third stage would be "the strategic offensive, when the enemy shall have been profoundly weakened."

The PPW strategy posited that revolution in the Philippines would be an essentially military struggle. The populist rhetoric about "serving the people" did not change the fact that the CPP's vision of revolution was never a process of self-emancipation but rather a substitutionist seizure of power by the party on behalf of "the people." For the CPP, this strategy was the immediate consequence of its analysis of the Philippine social formation. The Philippines was assumed to be a country in which imperialism had locked social-economic development in a 'semi-feudal' stage, and the masses of landless peasants, born of that economic stagnation, were to be the base of the people's army.

As the regime went into crisis and the movement grew, the limitations of this strategy became clear. On Mindanao, the large island in the south of the Philippine archipelago, there were more recruits than weapons. And to move from the first to the second stage, the fighters needed the kind of weapons that would allow them to engage government forces in longer battles. Quitariano shows the NPA's dilemma in a chapter describing an attack by the NPA. After combining several units, the NPA ambushed an army transport. Well executed, the attack was initially successful and the guerrillas pinned down the government forces. But as soon as the government troops received reinforcements, the guerrillas were forced to retreat. Armed with nothing more than rifles, the NPA fighters were no match for a single armored vehicle.

Without shoes

At the time of this attack, Quitariano had been a party member for several years. He grew up in Misamis Oriental in northeastern Mindanao and was born in a farmer's family of small land-owners. Although considered better off because they owned their land, life was difficult. But Quitariano was able to attend school and for college he entered a seminary. It is through Church circles that Quitariano became politicized in the seventies. Initially, he was associated with the Khi Rho, a group of Catholic social-democrats. But the radical ideas propounded by the CPP and its satellite organizations became influential in progressive Catholic circles and Quitariano ended up joining the armed struggle. There was no dramatic moment of radicalization or of opting for Maoism. For someone of his social background, this process of radicalization and the importance of progressive Catholicism was not atypical.

In the first part of *Deeper Grounds, Darker Shadows* Quitariano narrates his years as a party member in the Philippines, describing his joining the armed struggle as well as his arrest, imprisonment and torture. Quitariano also introduces a recurring theme in the book; his 'selfishness' in wanting children while dedicating his life to the party, leaving his partner Agnes with the responsibility of caring for them. The CPP did not support families of those who worked full-time for the revolution. Such activists were expected to be able to organize the necessary support themselves. In practice this meant that many fell back on traditional patterns and [women ended up](#) carrying most of the burden of the care work that made the full time political engagement of men possible.

The first part of the book gives an insider view of the movement in the Philippines. In only six pages, the chapter 'Way sapatos', meaning 'without shoes', gives a fascinating picture of the early development of the NPA. The title refers to how upon joining the guerrilla, Quitariano was told to get rid of 'petty-bourgeois' possessions like shoes and tooth-brush. Adopting a lifestyle that was poorer than many of the peasants they wanted to organize was propagandistically useful as it showed the revolutionaries' selflessness and dedication. But local realities do not

match the crude categories of Maoist “class analysis”, as was for example shown by a conversation with a leader of an indigenous community. After explaining to him the evils of the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos, Quitoriano and his comrade were politely asked, “who this Marcos was.” The community was so isolated that roaming wild boars were a more pressing issue.

“Way sapatos” also mentions a darker side to the NPA’s functioning. To gain the support of local people, the NPA needed to make itself useful. Like other NPA members, Quitoriano “assumed various roles”; “health worker, legal advisor, marriage counselor, soldier and political broker.” The NPA also “got rid” of “thieves, rapists, usurers and cattle rustlers.” In the absence of a prison system, “the accused would face capital punishment and burial in unmarked graves.” The cavalier way in which the NPA assumed the role of executioner would come back to haunt the movement in the “purges” that wrecked it in the eighties.

World traveler for the revolution

When Shigenobu offered to facilitate international travel for Quitoriano, his commander, Romulo “Rolly” Kintanar did not hesitate for a second. After the 1977 arrest of the CPP’s first chairman and ideologue Jose Maria “Joma” Sison, a new leadership led the party to greater heights. Kintanar, who would be [killed](#) in 2003 by his former comrades, became the overall commander of the NPA and built an overall command structure. It was Kintanar who asked Quitoriano to join this “general command” and gave him the blessing to travel abroad.

Whether Quitoriano visited the North-Korean Workers Party, Muammar Gaddafi, the Nicaraguan Sandinistas or Palestinian organizations sheltered by Syria, his pitch was the same: the NPA was fighting a U.S.-backed government, so any support they could give would weaken a common enemy. As a representative of the NPA’s “general command”, Quitoriano was not in a position to discuss political links. Quitoriano portrays himself as a loyal soldier, carrying out his assignment. But when describing the Byzantine worship of the Kim dynasty in North-Korea or Gaddafi’s insistence that it is necessary to target the children of the enemy, it is clear what Quitoriano’s feelings are.

The concrete results of Quitoriano’s travels were modest, or even useless, like the Libyans training NPA-members to drive tanks they did not have. Already in the late Cold War years, it was difficult to find a power that was willing and able to provide decisive support to the NPA.

On paper, the CPP was a monolithic organization. Reality was more complicated. The archipelagic character of the country and the poor infrastructure made it difficult to concentrate forces but also provided the NPA with opportunities to evade government troops. The CPP adopted what it called “centralized leadership and decentralized operations.” Cadre were responsible for specific regions and had to implement a “general line” decided upon by the top leadership but to a large degree they were left to their own devices. They could go for months or sometimes even years without contact with the central leadership. Command structures often had an improvised character. The NPA was supposed to be led by a military commission but this commission was never convened. Kintanar instead formed the “general command” from people he picked.

When, after his release from prison in 1986, Sison again became party chairperson, he attempted to assert his authority over the NPA. But by this time, Sison was in exile in the Dutch city of Utrecht. According to Quitoriano, Kintanar “worked hard to enable Sison to return home with his safety and security assured.” But Sison was “unwilling, preferring Utrecht’s safe distance from the Philippine military.” The result was deepening resentment between the two and conflicts over authority.

Kintanar was first of all a soldier trying to address the question of how to move from one phase of “people’s war” to

another, a move that required specific skills and resources. The party's ideology was of little help here. It assumed that the growth of popular support and NPA military strength would correspond to each other in a process of linear development. The inspiration for this was a mythologized view of the Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions, one that did not, among other factors, recognize the role of insurrections, foreign support, as well as international solidarity, and diplomacy.

In the early 1980s the development of the revolutionary movement threw up questions that could not be addressed by the stereotyped notions of the Protracted Peoples' War. Urban protests and the mass movement outpaced predictions. And especially after the so-called "[green revolution](#)", the capitalist character of social relations in the country-side became more pronounced. The growth of a rural proletariat accelerated. Some activists, such as the head of the party's Mindanao commission, [Edgar Jopson](#), tried to develop alternative strategic notions. Rather than seeing the rural guerrilla as, per PPW definition, "the highest form of struggle" the role of mass struggles, legal work and urban insurrections was re-evaluated.

The principle of "centralized leadership and decentralized operations" allowed a considerable degree of pluralism in practice but experiences that contradicted the PPW-strategy did not lead to a change in the party's orientation. The leadership rather tried to force the analysis of developments in the PPW framework. The PPW orthodoxy was not working out, but neither was an alternative strategy elaborated for the party.

Things fall apart

In January 2003, two gunmen [killed](#) Kintanar inside a restaurant. The CPP claimed responsibility, declaring a "[people's court](#)" had sentenced Kintanar to the "maximum penalty" a decade earlier. Arrested in 1991, Kintanar had not rejoined the movement after his 1992 release. According to the CPP, Kintanar had been working for the government. The assassination of Kintanar was part of a series of killings by the CPP of former members and other leftists.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a debate about strategy began to take place but this was cut short when Sison and his faction, supporters of Maoist orthodoxy and PPW, began expelling those they disagreed with. In 1992, Sison sent a statement to Philippine newspapers [accusing](#) Kintanar and others of being enemy agents.

Quitoriano portrays Jose Maria Sison as arrogant and out of his depth in international exchanges, a judgment that corresponds with that of others. On the other hand, Quitoriano admires Kintanar, stressing his bravery and integrity. But some of Kintanar's decisions show questionable political instincts. According to Quitoriano, the NPA's 1987 announcement of a coming "general offensive" was a ruse, an attempt to distract the government army during an ultimately failed attempt by the NPA at bringing in weapons from North Korea. But what were the costs in terms of morale and credibility of announcing an offensive that never came? The single-minded pursuit of material resources also motivated what Quitoriano describes as "diving deep in the pernicious shadow economy"; to "encourage more daring" efforts by militants, they were given "incentives"; "they could use part of their loot – cars, houses, guns and entertainment – as long as these things were justified as part of their operations." Such practices damaged the revolutionaries' credibility.

In the end, it was the search for financial resources that would be the end of Quitoriano's revolutionary engagement. One of the concrete results of Quitoriano's travels was a gift of one million dollars from Gaddafi. Quitoriano describes how this money became mixed up with forged dollars supplied through the JRA. When a Dutch contact tried to deposit the sum in Swiss bank accounts, the forged bills were detected. The Dutch intermediary was arrested, the party lost access to over a million dollars. In the Netherlands, the affair triggered a scandal over the use of

development aid to funnel money to armed revolutionaries. Quitariano, whose association with Kintanar already made him suspect in Sison's eyes, was held responsible for the debacle.

The book closes with an epilogue looking back at the purges mentioned before. Although Quitariano was not involved directly, he does well not to ignore this horrible episode. At several points during the 1980s, CPP leaders became convinced that setbacks of the movement could be explained only as the result of sabotage from within. This led to hunts for so-called "deep penetration agents." Not only were suspects assumed to be guilty, torture was frequently used to make them "confess" the names of co-conspirators. Predictably, this led to snowballing accusations as terrified victims said whatever they assumed their tormentors wanted to hear. Such "confessions" were sufficient reason to murder people. Especially in Mindanao, the movement "mutilated [itself](#)." Well over 1000 people were murdered by their own comrades.

Deeper Grounds, Darker Shadows could be read as a morality tale. What started out as a heroic endeavor by shoeless guerrillas who as a kind of militant mendicant monks wanted to serve the people, ended up in criminal affairs and fratricidal murder. But such an interpretation would leave out other aspects, equally essential to the history Quitariano describes. For example, how armed struggle, with all its demands, was essential to maintain resistance against the Marcos regime, even if the specific strategy of the People's War turned out to be a dead end. The CPP rose to be a mass movement, driven forward by ordinary people fighting for a better life for the poor and oppressed. Its successes, its failure and also its crimes are part of the development of the Philippine Left and need to be kept in mind by those working for a socialist alternative.

20 April 2026

Source: [Tempest](#).

PS:

If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of International Viewpoint. Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of [this article](#) for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.

[1] Published by University of Wisconsin Press, 2025.