

The Lava Brothers

Blood and Politics

Jose Y Dalisay Jr

For over three decades — from the late 1930s to the early 1970s — the Lava brothers exerted a seminal influence on the Philippine Left. Three of the six brothers served as general secretaries of the Communist Party, demonstrating the efficacy of the old Filipino mix of blood and politics — even, and interestingly, in the context of a Marxist revolutionary movement. This excerpt from a new and forthcoming biography of the Lavas traces the development of the family's intellectual traditions and follows each brother's life as person and partisan.

MOST ORDINARY FILIPINOS HAVE LIVED IN THE SHADOW and by the sufferance of such dynasties as the Marcoses, the Lopezes, the Aquinos, the Laurels, and the Cojuangcos, among others — families which have ritually sired presidents and kingmakers, tycoons, rakes, sportsmen, and society belles. But none of them were like — and there may never be another Filipino family like — the Lavas.

Over four decades, from the 1930s up to the 1970s, five Lava brothers — Vicente, Francisco [Paquito], Horacio, Jose [Peping], and Jesus — exerted a major presence in Filipino politics. But theirs was a politics entirely alien — indeed, diametrically opposed — to the landed and governing classes. Vicente, Jose, and Jesus became general secretaries of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), Horacio and Francisco remaining staunch nationalists all their lives. There was a sixth brother, Pedro, who led a colorful if troubled life which ended before World War II, and three sisters, Rosario, Remedios, and Socorro. Of the siblings, only Jose and Jesus are still alive.

How a moderately affluent landowning family from the heartland of Bulacan could breed such a steady line of committed communists and in-

JOSE Y DALISAY JR teaches English at the University of the Philippines where he is an associate professor.

tellectuals remains an enduring wonder in these times — then and now — of shameless materialism and political opportunism. Given their talents, they could very well have chosen to lead predictably pleasant lives. Vicente, a government *pensionado*, held a PhD in chemistry from Columbia University; Horacio and Francisco also held advanced degrees in economics

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and law from Berkeley and Stanford, respectively; Jose was a lawyer-CPA whose University of the Philippines thesis was adjudged the best of his class; Jesus was a medical doctor, also graduating from the UP.

Instead, these brothers — and the wives, sisters, and children who supported them — chose struggle over comfort, and people over person, in lifelong commitments that have defined, for the family, a

certain ethic, a certain response to the opportunity to excel, to lead, and to serve. That they were communists or communist sympathizers would seem immaterial to the fact of their having served, but it was not; they were Filipinos first and foremost, but they understood the plight of the Filipino as being part of a global condition, which, to their thinking, Marxism best addressed and rectified.

. . . . [The family patriarch] Adeodato was a strict and upright man — a ‘taskmaster’, according to Jesus, who saw to it that they studied very well. As a young teacher, Adeodato was yet to develop the patience that time and Maria’s support would bring. The boy Vicente would have a chair thrown at him for his mistakes, but by the time Adeodato was teaching Peping, 15 years later, the punishment had lapsed into ear pulling.

Maestrong Dasiong went to the classroom with no set subjects, teaching whatever he felt like. In a photograph captioned ‘Municipal Boy Officials Week, 12 December 1931, Bulacan, Bulacan’, Adeodato — in a cream linen suit, white shirt, and tie — stands with 14 boys in front of what seems to be a church or schoolhouse. He is smiling into the camera, clearly in his element as a molders of young men. When young Buddy [his grand-

son Vicente Jr] came to visit, he would give the boy algebra problems to solve.

Despite his disciplinary outbursts, *Maestrong* Dasiong is remembered by his grandchildren as having been ‘very humane’, according to Jesus, ‘even if he did not show his emotions on the outside. But you could feel it in his dealings with the members of the family, with other people, and the masses. In our house we had a regular dinner or lunch for the helpers in the place. My father and my mother were early environmentalists. They were strict about cutting trees and my mother wouldn’t allow the shooting of birds.’

Music played a great part in the Lavas’ upbringing. The sisters studied the piano and could read notes, but only the men really played it — strictly by ear — Jesus becoming the most proficient among them. Peping also played the banjo, Vicente the violin (although Frances calls him ‘the world’s worst violinist’), and Paquito the flute and banjo. Pedro, Horacio, and Jesus had nice singing voices, Horacio’s voice being the loudest and — with Peping’s — the most laden with emotion.

They played both classical and popular pieces, and sang both Tagalog and English songs. During Christmases, New Years, and birthdays, the boys sang together. Jesus recalls that Pedro’s favorite song was ‘Sunrise’. One of Peping’s and Jesus’s favorites was ‘*Kung sa Lurwalhati*’, a popular serenade that Pedro had been the first to learn. In the 1970s, the same song would be sung with romantic fervor by another generation of activists.

‘They were such a joyful family,’ Nick Joaquin (1964) would write following Jesus’ arrest in 1964, ‘that, today, people who knew them in happier days say: “Maybe it’s not good for a family to be so joyous.”’

The story goes that when Vicente graduated from college, one of his professors came up to him and said, ‘Well, Lava, I guess you know everything about chemistry.’ Vicente replied: ‘Yup.’ But he knew, of course, that there was more to be learned. In those days, the AB course took three years; an additional two years of higher study earned a Bachelor of Science de-

gree. Although Vicente eventually earned a PhD in physical chemistry from Columbia University, his grades at the UP showed more of an interest and talent in the physics subjects of light, heat, and magnetism, rather than the compounds of organic and inorganic chemistry.

After joining the UP faculty as an assistant professor in chemistry, Vicente left for the United States in 1917 on a government fellowship to pursue graduate studies. While in school, he enlisted in Berkeley, California as a private in the US Army in April 1918, close to the tailend of World War I. He did not see action in Europe, but as will be established later, this interlude would have some significance in turning him around from his Catholic faith to a kind of liberal agnosticism, and then to Marxism. Appropriately enough, Vicente worked in the army's chemical warfare division, where he suffered a small burn.

Less than a year after enlistment, in January 1919, he would be honorably discharged, his official discharge papers giving the spare particulars of the man: 'age, 23; occupation, student; dark brown eyes, black hair, dark complexion, 5'9".' Buddy remembers his father as being slightly taller — just half an inch under six feet — but wonders even more why Vicente might have volunteered to join the Army in the first place, as he almost surely had not been drafted. Was this — in the normally staid Vicente — a manifest streak of adventurism, an impulse to try something new and different?

A formal photograph from January 1920 has Vicente wearing a cravat and wire-rimmed glasses, suggesting a man of composure who, though not yet 25, describes himself in the caption as someone 'with more experience and foresight'. Later that year he would relax and lean against a cairn in East Northfield, Massachusetts, in boots and a tam-o'-shanter: 'Resting after a hard day's work'.

From Berkeley, Vicente moved to Columbia University in New York for his master's and PhD, and it was here where he would not only develop into a brilliant scientist, but become a husband as well.

What probably began as a casually familiar case of a friend knowing another friend turned into an unlikely romance that would cross several oceans and withstand many instances and degrees of separation. The young woman's name was Ruth Propper; she was the daughter of Jewish

Bohemian immigrants, and so may have shared, with Vicente, some of the feelings of a newcomer in American society. But they were both living in New York — home even then to millions of immigrants and aliens — and this circumstance alone made it easier for one to meet the other. Ruth was working for a pharmaceutical company that was developing a vaccine against typhus, of which there had been a recent outbreak. In the next building was a place where some Filipinos worked; Ruth came to know them, and through them, she met Vicente.

After returning from the US with his PhD, Vicente worked as a physical chemist in the Bureau of Science from 1923 to 1925 on the utilization of low-grade coals. At the same time, he lectured in chemistry at National University.

He then taught again at the UP, this time as an associate professor in physical and colloidal chemistry in the College of Agriculture in Los Baños, Laguna, from 1925 to 1929. There he began his famous coconut research that culminated many years later in an American patent in his name on the manufacture of clear white oil directly from the fresh grated meat of the coconut.

Vicente's next five years after Los Baños were spent in the US. From 1929 to 1930, Vicente worked at Oberlin College in Ohio on a Grasselli research fellowship and, with Dr Holmes, conducted studies on Vitamin B. From 1931 to 1934, he worked as a chemist in the New York Appraisers Laboratories of the United States Treasury Department and at the same time served as a research associate at New York University.

On his return to the Philippines in 1935, he was engaged as a consulting chemist by Consolidated Mines to study the use of the company's low-grade chromite. However, he resented the considerable disparity between his salary and what the Americans in the company were getting, believing that he was better qualified than they were.

In 1937, with the help of Dr Victoriano Elicaño, formerly of the Bureau of Mines, he went to the United States to secure a patent on his clear

white coconut oil manufacturing process. Sometime around this period, Vicente was recruited by the Communist Party of the USA, which later transmitted his membership to the local party.

When he graduated from Manila High School at age 16, Paquito Lava took on a motto he would pass on to his children: 'I was born a Filipino, I will live a Filipino, I will die a Filipino.' This motto probably assumed a keener significance for Paquito just after he made it up, because in 1919, shortly after graduation, he found himself — along with his brother Pedro — on a steamship bound for America.

Neither of them had a scholarship nor substantial financial support from the family beyond their fare, which their mother Maria provided. By the time their ship docked in either Hong Kong or Shanghai, Pedro — who was something of a gambler and a ladies' man — had already lost all his money. Paquito gave him half of what he had. When the same thing happened in San Francisco, Paquito decided that the better recourse for them was to split up.

Each basically went his own way upon arrival in the US, taking on a succession of menial jobs. They kept in touch in California — Pedro tapping the more prudent Paquito for the odd dollar — but Pedro soon drifted out of range in Alaska, where he was reported to have been once stabbed. All this time, Vicente was in New York, pursuing his PhD at Columbia.

Paco [Francisco Jr] remembers a story about Paquito and Pedro, his 'Uncle Pete', which took place in a barbershop in California. 'They were having their hair cut when they heard an American taunting them, calling them "Charlie, Charlie" [a reference to their Chinese features]. Uncle Pete — a big man — whispered to Daddy: "Get ready to run." As soon as they got their haircuts, they pounced on the American, who collapsed. Then they ran away.'

Pedro was too proud to work in lowly occupations, feeling that Filipinos were looked down upon for taking such jobs, but Paquito had no such qualms, working as a busboy even as he made good money and got extra food teaching math to American children, as well as grammar and logic. Despite his proficiency in English, Paquito never lost his Filipino accent, probably because — Paco surmises — he kept on speaking Tagalog with

his Filipino friends in California. Paquito was also very active in organizing the Filipino students at Berkeley, among whom his best friend was Tony Bautista.

Since Paquito was only a high school graduate, he enrolled at the University of California at Berkeley where he took his AB, his law degree, and his doctorate. He graduated with his Juris Doctor degree in May 1925, submitting a thesis on 'Insurable Interest'. Paquito was among the sharpest students in his classes — something he took great pride in. 'Once,' Paco says, 'he went to the secretary of one of his professors — known to be one of the stingiest professors when it came to giving grades. Daddy complained about his grade, which might have been a B. The secretary replied: "My God, but that's already the highest grade!"'

He became a member of the Phi Kappa Phi honor society, and even joined the football team — as cheerleader and waterboy — although, according to his son Manoling, he was such a good storyteller that it was easy to believe that he had been part of the team itself, despite his puny size. When he came home and as the boys grew up, Paquito would teach them the UC fight song — 'So then it's up for the blue and gold, down with the [Stanford] red, California's up for a victory...' — which Paco and Manoling would learn by heart.

When Paquito returned from the United States in 1926, he taught high school in Silliman University in Dumaguete at about the same time he took his bar examinations. Uncharacteristically, Paquito flunked [because of the objective nature of the questions]. One aspect of Paquito's character did assert itself: before the exams, some friends who apparently had access to the questions offered him a copy, which Paquito refused. Instead, after his first failure, Paquito restudied the law the way the locals did it, retook the exams, and passed.

After teaching at Silliman, Paquito moved to the National Teachers College in Manila, where he taught law and English; here he struck up a friendship with Jose P Laurel, later to become president of the Japanese-sponsored wartime republic. When he passed the bar, Paquito was recruited into the Bureau of Justice, where he developed lifelong and vital friendships with such legal luminaries as JBL Reyes, Roberto Concepcion,

Emilio Abello, Roberto Kapunan, and Arsenio Dizon. These people would form the core of the Civil Liberties Union and, except for Kapunan, become members of the Supreme Court. It was also at the bureau where Paquito became associated with Secretary Jose Abad Santos — becoming the secretary's speechwriter — and with Jose Yulo.

Vicente did his best to recruit Paquito into the Party — an effort he never undertook with Peping and Jesus — but Paquito had become too independent an individual to subject himself to Party discipline and its avowed principle of 'democratic centralism' or voluntarily to dictation from his older brother, and he stayed out of the formal organization. When Vicente asked him to join the Party, Paquito effectively declined by demanding that he become general secretary upon his joining; Vicente was flustered. Paquito could and often did criticize the Party and even his brothers over differences of policy, with the kind of irreverence and humor — much like Jesus' — that people like Ruth did not appreciate.

Horacio's son Junior is certain that the Party also tried to recruit his father, but that Horacio declined membership, preferring to help from the sidelines, like his brother Paquito. 'He valued his family very much. Maybe he didn't want to compromise the future of his family especially since three of his brothers were already involved.' Nonetheless, Horacio approved of his brothers' activities, and as an economist appreciated Marx. He later joined the Movement for the Advancement of Nationalism.

Peping did not have much of a social life as a young man. Among the brothers, Pedring, Paquito and Jesus were what Jesus himself calls 'the social animals'. Instead, Peping joined the orchestra. 'I hated the military, so I joined the orchestra,' he says. 'I didn't know how to read notes, but I managed. My brother Paquito, he got a free ride back from the US on a ship because he played the banjo.' This was in 1926; Peping got the banjo that Paquito had brought with him, and learned to play pieces like 'Always' and 'Five-Foot-Two' by ear.

The more gregarious Jesus played tennis — also Vicente's sport — at the Victoria Garden in front of Araullo High School. He had taught him-

self the game, playing at age 14 or 15 against men twice his age. Earlier, Jesus had taken up athletics, and then played football at the UP campus in Padre Faura, the soccer field being where the Court of Appeals now stands. Jesus would continue playing tennis until his early 80s, getting onto the court at 5:30 in the morning. 'But we play three to a side,' he says now. At 83, and despite a creeping hoarseness in his voice, he still walks with a spring in his step.

After graduating from high school in 1929, Peping Lava went on to what was then the UP School of Business, majoring in accounting. After that, he went to the UP College of Law in 1933 and graduated in 1937.

The UP where all the brothers except Paquito and Pedro would go to college was then located on Padre Faura Street; Peping and Jesus had already played soccer and track in the area as children, when they lived on Arkansas. 'I think it was supposed to be understood from the very beginning that we were going to enter UP,' Jesus says. Horacio — eight years older than Peping — also took up accounting.

Accounting was not as popular among students as medicine or the law, but Peping was concerned about learning a profession that would enable him to support himself and to raise a family. Despite many invitations, Peping joined no fraternities, becoming instead a member of honor societies which emphasized academic achievement. He became a communist late in 1937, right after he passed the bar.

Jesus graduated from high school in 1931 and went on as expected to the UP, taking a pre-med course without having made up his mind on what exactly he wanted to do next. 'What made me decide to go into medicine was the fact that my mother had asked Horacio to become a doctor, but Horacio would have none of it. And so, to satisfy my mother's desire to have a doctor for a son, and having no particular inclinations otherwise, I took up medicine. I liked the idea. There was no resistance whatsoever.'

Despite his impression of Vicente as having been naive, Paquito got along very well with his *kuya*, who was older than him by six years. From their youngest days, Vicente acted like the eldest brother he was, deciding what he thought was best for his siblings. But Vicente often depended on Paquito to draft position papers, which Paquito obliged.

They agreed on most basic points: like Vicente, Paquito believed in the need for more and genuine industrialization to enlarge the economic pie. He refused to accept what he saw to be the imperialist bromide about the Philippines being an essentially agricultural country, and therefore incapable of genuine industrialization. Paquito pointed out that the Ameri-

cans industrialized and increased their agricultural production at the same time; therefore, the two programs were not necessarily incompatible.

All the brothers wrote well and effectively; even dropout Pedro edited a Filipino newspaper in the US. But Jesus, who admits to having written the most, also claims having been the weakest writer of

them all: 'I was the only one who didn't know how to write,' he says modestly. 'I began writing only when I became general secretary of the Party. I was forced to study writing. I wrote the most, but I had to ask the others to correct my style.'

The last time the six brothers were all together was before the war in 1937 when Vicente gathered some journalists for a meeting. Pedro had just returned from the States the year before, and had joined the Popular Front and become a Communist Party member, although he never rose up the ranks like his brothers. In 1939 he died of tuberculosis, a disease he may have contracted in America, and the remaining brothers came together again for the funeral. The war and their growing responsibilities would make such meetings increasingly rarer.

Paco saw his father cry for the first time when Pedro died. 'He didn't grieve openly, but when he went to his room, he wept, and he just kept tossing and turning on the floor, tossing and turning, saying nothing.'

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Sometime in August 1942, the Japanese came around to Bulacan, Bulacan, looking for Vicente, reportedly to take advantage of his coconut process. (Another version has it that the Japanese suspected that arms were being manufactured in a tunnel beneath the big Lava house.) They raided the house in the *poblacion*, and the *nipa* house in Tibig. But Vicente by then was already in Nueva Ecija. Instead, they found and arrested Horacio, Adelaida, and Anita, among other people who also included Ramon Espiritu, later to be the CPP's communications chief. Espiritu was able to throw his gun into the toilet; like Horacio, he was later released.

Adelaida says that she and Anita were taken to the provincial jail and were interrogated by the Japanese — in English — for two days; the Japanese wanted to know where the other men were, but got nothing. Jesus was out somewhere in the Pinatubo area, Peping was in Manila, and Paquito in Cavite, where his wife had roots. One of the women had been caught with a message from Jesus; she swallowed the note. The Japanese could speak English because quite a number of them had been here before the war as military agents; some of them, Peping remembers, ran *mongo con hielo* refreshment stands.

When Jesus learned of the arrests, he was coming down from Mount Pinatubo, where he had been treating some American guerrillas as a member of the resistance organization Free Philippines. Jesus had been assigned to information, intelligence, and — as a medical doctor — medical duties. There was an American doctor in the guerrilla camp, but apparently he knew very little about tropical diseases, requiring Jesus's help. Jesus's route took him from Bulacan to Hagonoy, and then to Pampanga and beyond. Riding back in a *carretela*, he found people waiting for him on the trail with the news that Bulacan had been raided by the Japanese. He was diverted — after a brief but important interlude in Malolos — to Cabiao, where the Party operated a school for cadres in barrio Sinipit.

Toward the end of August 1942, Jesus became a Party member. The news of his wife's and his relatives' arrest proved to be a turning point in what, given his background, was an inevitable process.

Jesus had been drawn to communism when, as a medical intern, he came to realize that the maladies and illnesses that afflicted the poor pa-

tients he dealt with could not be solved by medicine or by doctors alone. It was also, of course, a matter of family tradition, given the Lavas' longstanding record of public service in Bulacan. But he credits Vicente and Marxism for providing the kind of theoretical integration that all of these perceptions, beliefs, and traditions needed. His work as a medical student gave him new and direct insights into human misery: 'I had seen how the poor people lived in the provinces, and now I confronted their conditions in Manila. It was truly terrible in the slums — they weren't called "squatters" yet, then. They were muddy and filthy, and what the people ate was sorely inadequate for their nutrition. That was why, without proper sanitation and nutrition, and no matter how much medicine you gave them, their ailments just kept coming back — tuberculosis, asthma, bron-

chitis, gastroenteritis — all kinds of diseases. This experience made it easier for me to join the Party during the war, when I was recruited. I was looking for something that would integrate what I was doing as a medical doctor into a certain theory of society.'

In Malolos, a high-ranking communist named Pedro 'Pete' Castro convinced Jesus to join the Party. Jesus asked for some time — a couple of weeks — to think it

over, his great remaining concern being the awareness that he would have to commit himself totally to the movement once he joined. Eventually he did, consulting no one else, and as soon as he was in, Jesus was sent to the Party school in Sinipit.

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They took a *carretela* to San Ildefonso, and from there they walked across the fields to Cabiao. 'The party school was new to me, very new. I could hardly understand anything.' The cadres' education included courses on the United Front, Dialectics, Political Economy, a basic text called *The Fundamental Spirit*, the Hukbalahap, and Guerrilla Tactics. There were at least four instructors — Jesus remembers an Eric Arrogante and a Banaag from Nueva Ecija among them — and from 20 to 25 stu-

dents. By comparison, only three subjects were taught when Peping took the course a few years earlier: Party Construction, Guerrilla Tactics, and the United Front. Also, the course took only two weeks to complete. In Peping's batch, there were a few women among the trainees.

Peping says that the school was really a house in the middle of Barrio Sinipit in Cabiao — a town where the borders of Nueva Ecija, Pampanga, and Bulacan converged — where the students also ate and slept. They rose at 5 in the morning, and by 7:30, when everyone had eaten and bathed, the classes began. The lectures and discussions lasted the whole day. No examinations were given, but even so the course was no cakewalk. 'I had to read *Das Kapital* but I never got to finish it. It was very difficult going for me, especially in the beginning,' Peping says. Jesus agrees that it did not seem very important then for a Party member to read classical Marxist texts and materials. As difficult as he found Marx, Peping would read Lenin and Stalin — all by himself, without any prodding from Vicente. He and his brothers, he says, did not become communists from reading books.

The big raid of 5 March 1943 caught Peping and two other companions in the same general zone of operations as Jesus was, in the Cabiao forest near Arayat. They lay flat on the ground as the Japanese swept the area, coming so close that Peping could hear the crunch of their boots. 'I thought they would step on my fingers.' They escaped — once confiscating and slaughtering a carabao for food — and moved to Manila where Vicente was.

In 1944, Peping received instructions to proceed to Negros and Panay. Ayding moved in with a friend in Sampaloc, having no idea how long her husband would be gone; she had become used to such uncalendared departures. Later she joined her children and other family members at the place of the Soliongcos in Angat.

The aftermath of the war saw tumultuous changes in the leadership of the postwar government and of the Communist Party itself. Through the Democratic Alliance, the Party had supported incumbent President Sergio Osmeña in the April 1946 presidential elections, arguing that his oppo-

nent, Manuel Roxas, had unforgivably collaborated with the Japanese during the war.

Diokno (1998) notes that 'aside from its welfare agenda, the Democratic Alliance was staunchly nationalistic. It desired a truly free and independent Philippines and thus opposed unequal relations with the United States. It was this aspect of the alliance's platform that later got it into trouble with the Roxas administration.'

The Alliance had been organized on 15 July 1945 in Quiapo, Manila. As Alfredo Saulo (1990) relates it:

Staunchly anticollaborationist, the DA was composed of prominent figures in the resistance movement.... The organization of the CLO, PKM, and DA was included in the postwar plan adopted by the CPP in its September 1944 central committee conference in Pampanga. It should be made clear, however, that the highest leaders of the DA and also the expanded CLO...were merely progressive intellectuals (not communists) who, at the time of their election, had not the faintest idea that their organizations had been conceived by the CPP months before the end of the war.

(Among the legal organizations set up by the Party was the Philippine Government Employees Association or PGEA. This task fell on Peping, who organized the PGEA in the mid-1940s along with Baltazar Cuyugan, who became PGEA president.)

Jesus Lava takes exception to Saulo's qualification denying some of these people's communist affiliations: 'The DA leaders were not communists, but who among the top leaders of the CLO weren't? Balgos? Joven? Capadocia? They were all CP members; only Cid was not.' Lava is emphatic on this point: the DA leadership knew that many of its members were communists.

The DA's first national executive committee was composed of Jesus Barrera, president; J Antonio Araneta, vice-president; Rafael Ledesma, secretary; JBL Reyes, Vicente Lava, Manuel Crudo, and Jose Hilario, members. Bernard Kerkvliet (1979) would observe that all six committee members 'came from prominent families, [were] well-educated, and [were] active in the Filipino left.' The DA's mass base, according to Saulo

(1990), comprised the members of the Civil Liberties Union, Free Philippines, the Blue Eagles, the PKM, the Huk Veterans League, and the CLO.

Kerkvliet (1979) continues: 'Although the Democratic Alliance originally intended to counter the Nacionalista Party, it later decided to endorse the NP's candidates for president (the incumbent Sergio Osmeña) and vice-president (Eulogio Rodriguez) for the 1946 elections. This was a difficult decision for the DA, as its previous criticism of Osmeña had been so sharp.' The CPP wanted to put up its own candidates for the top two positions, but 'a decisive majority of the DA's leadership, however, rejected this, as did a minority within the PKP itself (including Vicente Lava)'. Jesus Lava lays stress on the presence of nationalist and anti-imperialist elements within the Nacionalista Party as a crucial factor in the DA's choice of coalition partner within a 'nationalist front'.

All the living Lava brothers except Horacio — who was ill at the time — attended the convention of the Democratic Alliance at the Elite Theater on Hidalgo Street in Quiapo. They came expecting a riotous floor debate on the issue of whether or not to coalesce with other groups such as the Nacionalistas — an issue that had divided the Communist Party — but as it turned out, the sentiment for coalition was overwhelming among the 500 delegates or so who had come from all over. The DA decided that it could and would go along with Osmeña, who may have been 'reactionary and counterrevolutionary' but who, at least and unlike Manuel Roxas, had not collaborated with the Japanese regime and had not opposed immediate independence for the Philippines. Diokno (1998) notes in this regard that 'in some respects, the Liberal and Nacionalista parties were similar. They drew upon the same political and social base. Both included candidates who had had some wartime collaboration, although the Liberal Party tended to have more collaborators on its slate.'

Vicente Lava, who represented the CPP in the DA, ran for senator. A campaign flyer of Vicente's lists the official national candidates of the Democratic Alliance-Nacionalista Party-Popular Front Coalition. Aside from Osmeña, Rodriguez, and Lava, they were J Antonio Araneta, Emilio Javier, Ramon Diokno, Tomas Confesor, Tomas Cabili, Carlos Garcia, Jose Romero, Jose Vera, Pedro Insua, Rafael Martinez, Santiago

Fonacier, Pascual Azanza, Jose Altavas, Alejo Mabanag, and Pedro Singson Reyes. Vicente and Paquito advised the Alliance, although Paquito, as usual, carried no official title within the organization.

The flyer carried a quote from one of Vicente's letters to Judge Barrera just after the end of the war: 'I am now more sure than ever that the only hope of our country to rise economically is to industrialize.' The flyer goes on to describe Vicente's patriotism, his professional accomplishments, and his work in the resistance. It concludes: 'People who knew Vicente Lava are unanimous on two things about him: his intellect and his sincerity. To public service he brings these rare qualities.' Vicente took to the hustings, delivering long speeches in the English he was more comfortable with, although he spoke with a lisp; even then his rheumatic heart condition was sapping his strength.

Jesus remembers this campaign well: they rode on horses and covered 10 to 15 barrios in a night. But unlike other politicians who spent for veritable fiestas on their own behalf, Jesus and his party were fêted by the people themselves. Jesus says he hardly spent anything on his campaign; the peasants gave what they could, and one peasant organization even collected and sold *palay* to afford him a contribution. Paco worked as a campaign volunteer for his uncle: 'Tiyo Jesus

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was very popular — not only because he was a Party member, but also because he was very charming, and because the Lava name was highly respected.'

Jesus knew his audience, and they knew Jesus. Several months earlier, he had spoken at a huge rally in Malolos on nationalist issues, during which a heavy rain

had fallen; but no one left, and so neither did he. After that episode, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and was forced to stay home and rest for three months. Barely had he recovered when the campaign for Congress imposed new burdens on his body. 'I couldn't go home. I slept where I could, wherever I was at day's end.' The one favor he could not grant his provincemates was to accept the customary drink of *tuba* or coconut wine which every house or streetcorner seemed to offer. Jesus had been a beer drinker until he was 27; a particularly rowdy night topped off by a potent

gin cocktail left him flat on his back, and he forswore liquor from that point on. He also smoked from age 16 to 50, quitting only when he read a report by the American surgeon-general. 'The statistics convinced me,' he says. 'They didn't have any empirical proof before that.' He was already in prison when he quit: 'My wife brought me two cartons of my brand, Pall Mall. I told myself, after reading the report, that I would finish one last carton and quit. I did, and I haven't touched a stick since.'

Peping Lava — who also smoked, quitting only in the 1970s — was involved as well in the DA campaign, but he worked mainly in the backroom, writing press releases and drafting documents for others to affix their signatures to.

An unsigned, typewritten, and obviously confidential document which Peping Lava acknowledges to have written poses important questions about the DA's orientation and organization. Entitled 'Notes for the Democratic Alliance Directorate', the document is undated, but it was clearly written after the April 1946 elections. It asks: 'The first and to my mind the most important question that should now be decided is whether it is worthwhile to continue the Democratic Alliance as an independent political party, or whether it would be better to dissolve the party and permit its members to join other existing parties.' The document then inquires after the DA's program with respect to labor, the agrarian problem, and industrialization.

The third and fourth questions, however, are the more interesting in hindsight, having to do with the DA's strategy and tactics:

Does the Democratic Alliance intend to carry out its program by obtaining control of the government? Or will it be content with playing a pivotal role, supporting that party that adopts its program or one substantially the same?... Will it be advantageous... for the Democratic Alliance to strike out on an independent route? Or should it string along with the Nacionalista Party for the present until such time as it has gathered sufficient strength to stand alone?

According to Kerkvliet (1979), the DA had read the race between Osmeña and Roxas as being extremely close, with the DA votes to decide

the issue; as it happened, Osmeña did carry the DA's bastions in Central Luzon, but even his wide margin was not enough to offset an eventual Roxas victory. A lackluster effort by Osmeña proved no match for the younger Roxas's vigorous and well-financed campaign.

To no one's great surprise, Roxas ran away with the presidency, winning by over 200,000 votes; his running-mate Elpidio Quirino defeated Eulogio Rodriguez for the vice-presidency. With his victory, Roxas promptly declared that, 'by popular vote, he had been "completely cleared of all taint of collaboration" and "fully vindicated by the highest and fairest tribunal that can pass upon such matters"' (Diokno 1998).

The DA's national candidates lost, but all six of the DA's candidates for Congress in Central Luzon won by convincing margins: Jesus Lava (Bulacan), Luis Taruc and Amado Yuzon (Pampanga), Jose Cando and Constancio Padilla (Nueva Ecija), and Alejandro Simpauco (Tarlac).

The DA's winning candidates took office in Congress, albeit too briefly. For Jesus Lava, parliament was a new arena for the struggle — even at a time when, he remembers, many congressmen had the habit of bringing their favorite sidearms with them to the congressional floor. Nothing of substance was discussed in the few weeks that Jesus and his partymates sat in session, and he recalls spending some loose time playing stud and draw poker with such stalwarts of the establishment as Representatives Floro Crisologo, Lorenzo Teves, Justiniano Montano, and several others.

'Immediately upon convening of the first Congress of 1946, the Liberals, through (Congressman Jose Topacio) Nueño, introduced a resolution expelling the DA congressmen due to terrorism, but it was not immediately approved. So for the time being, we were still there. We were in our rooms, we received our salaries, we debated on the floor of Congress.... That shows you that the so-called expulsion was not a physical expulsion, but merely the official refusal of the Congress officials to note down the votes of the DA congressmen. Whenever the voting came around, they did not just note down the votes of the DA congressmen, preparatory of course, to the vote on parity,' Jesus says. 'They were so used to not counting our votes that when they voted on the Bell Trade Act and the parity rights, our votes were not counted.'

The Roxas government maneuvered — brazenly but successfully — to secure the required number of votes in Congress for the passage of the controversial Bell Trade Agreement and the parity amendments to the Constitution.

This meant the expulsion of the DA congressmen, on trumped-up charges of electoral fraud and terrorism. Just as spectacularly as they had walked into Congress, the progressive congressmen found themselves back on the street. Widespread unrest followed this expulsion. This series of incidents would lead Jesus Lava to insist, many years later, that 'the greatest violator of human rights was Roxas, the founder of the Liberal Party, more than Marcos and all the presidents put together.'

Jesus also found himself saddled with other reasons to make a hasty departure from Congress. 'I didn't come back because the place where I was staying was raided. This gave the impression that I was expelled.' In fact, the 'expulsion' was later overturned by the courts, where the DA's lawyers contested the controversial congressional resolution. Three years later, the Supreme Court ruled in the DA's favor, but by then it was too late: a congressman served for three years, and Lava and Taruc had long gone underground.

Jesus had to leave Congress because he knew his life to be in danger. Just after the elections, Jesus' opponent — a certain Florante Roque — had congratulated Jesus by telegram and effectively conceded. Later, however — after the DA furor in Congress and after Jesus went underground — Roque filed a protest, which the Lavas believe was instigated by Roxas and the Americans. Jesus, of course, could not appear on his own behalf to answer Roque's protest, because he knew that he was going to be killed if he turned up. By this time, Jesus was on the run, avoiding a bum rap for murder and the vengeance of the dead man's friends.

The loss of Osmeña in the 1946 elections, the expulsion from Congress of the DA members, and the killing of Juan Feleo might have discouraged the CPP from any further participation in traditional electoral politics, but with Quirino running in the 1949 election, the Party felt obliged to support his opponent — the wartime president himself, Jose P

Laurel. (Peping would qualify their backing of Laurel — whom they had roundly scored for ‘wartime collaboration’ — as ‘critical support’, conveyed largely by word of mouth (Lachica 1971).)

Laurel lost in what would be described as ‘the bloodiest and dirtiest’ elections ever held in the Philippines up to that point. Nevertheless, the Party saw a positive aspect in the situation, in that it could convert the public’s outrage over the conduct and the outcome of the polls — on top of the country’s festering social and economic woes — into genuine revolutionary fervor.

Between Christmas 1949 and the middle of January 1950, the Politburo met in the Sierra Madre, with Peping Lava now presiding as general secretary. In this meeting, the PB-In and PB-Out were created, each to operate from within and without the metropolitan center, respectively. The PB-Out was composed of Jesus, GY [Casto Alejandrino], Luis Taruc, Peregrino Taruc, and Mateo del Castillo, with Jesus serving as the general secretary. GY replaced Luis Taruc as head of the military department; Luis moved over to take charge of the organizational department, while his brother Pedro headed the educational department, and Castillo — the former leader of the peasants’ movement — took over finance.

After a series of reports, the discussion came around to the most significant item on the agenda: the ‘Formation of Party Policy and Tasks’. Here, too — by Luis Taruc’s account (1967) — Peping led off the discussion with a paper analyzing ‘the current national and international situation. He paid particular attention to the recession that was developing in the United States and to the victorious revolution of the Communists in China.... He concluded his political analysis with the observation that a “revolutionary situation” already existed in the most strategic economic and political regions of the country. He said that the revolutionary sentiment of the masses was steadily growing, and, in view of the steadily growing international and national situations, would surely develop a national revolutionary crisis.... Jose Lava’s purpose was to show that we were on the verge of precisely such a situation — the Communist revolution was at hand.’ This situation, by Peping’s estimate, would have led to a ‘revolutionary crisis’ within two years.

. . . . In 1951, the Party decided to boycott the elections. The boycott failed, and it was a mistake that even Jesus recognized almost immediately. 'We thought that it was the right decision to make in the light of our experience in the 1949 elections,' Jesus says. 'We thought we could bring the masses around toward the boycott. But we failed, and so we changed our whole policy on participating in the elections. Another change had to do with the Central Committee's decision to put up local revolutionary governments. We had to scrap that, too. By that time — this was 1951 — we began to think in terms of a real protracted war. We were thinking in terms of an underground organization — an underground network that would be the mainstay of the movement [alongside] guerrilla warfare in the military front. So one of our decisions was to recruit and train a lot of cadres for our organization. But here we also failed. Our rate of recruitment was even less than the rate of capture and surrender.'

Military terrorism had been the Huks' own best recruiter. For as long as the common folk suffered hardships under the military yoke, the Huks were assured of fresh and eager converts. Ironically, when the terror abated, the fatigue of vigilance and resistance took its toll and even cadres in the mountains came down and went home, feeling that the worst was over.

. . . . Luis Taruc's memories of Jesus and Peping Lava are, rather understandably, much less pleasant. A farmer's son who never got beyond his freshman year in college, Taruc was in some ways the homegrown foil to the urbane and intellectual Lavas, with three of whom he worked in close quarters. He had helped to organize the peasants in Central Luzon in the 1930s; later he joined the Socialist Party, and became an officer in the CPP after the 1938 merger between the two parties. He commanded a considerable following among the Huks, despite his emphatic declaration, made in his 1967 autobiography, that 'I could never become an all-out Bolshevik.'

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.... The rift between Luis Taruc on the one hand and Peping, Jesus, and GY on the other is one of the sorriest, most painful, and occasionally ugly aspects of the common life into which these men have been bound by their choices and the exigencies of war. The wound runs long and deep, and it still clearly hurts on both sides.

Luis Taruc has been said to be seeking some form of reconciliation with the surviving brothers, to let bygones be bygones. At a 1985 reunion of old Huk comrades held under writer F Sionil Jose's auspices, Taruc embraced Paco Lava, saying, 'I was a friend of your father's.' That clinch may be harder to achieve with Peping, who — sitting erect in his highbacked chair — is adamant in his position: 'No reconciliation is possible without an admission [on Taruc's part] of error.'

Peping Lava, originally sentenced to life imprisonment, would not be released from prison until nearly 20 years after his arrest in 1950 — on 4 January 1970, a week short of his 58th birthday. Peping had acquired tuberculosis, despite the discipline and the routine he had subjected himself to for those two decades of confinement. It had been a life with few amenities; Ayding — known around the place as the *mestisang matapang* — had brought Peping a one-burner stove, on which Ramon Espiritu did the cooking.

Peping believes that it was Ferdinand Marcos who had him released. But, he asserted then as he still does, 'I entered prison a communist and I left it a communist.' Peping had never met Marcos face-to-face, although he had been interested in the man's beliefs, asking about them from Paquito during the latter's prison visits. Peping was subsequently convinced from what he heard that Marcos, to some extent, could be counted on to stand up to the Americans; this to him was more significant than reports he was also receiving about Marcos' abuses and atrocities.

Right after his release, Peping and Ayding went to the Soviet Union, and from there to Prague. It was his first trip abroad. Peping says that he went to Moscow on his own volition, without any party's sponsorship; he

applied for the trip with the Soviets, who were pleased and honored to receive him.

There, today [in the house in Mandaluyong] one hears the lively clatter of *mahjongg* tiles with GY, Anita, Ayding, and another friend or housemate making an easy foursome; Peping would just as likely be reading in his basement room. A neighboring chicken coop peppers the conversation with bright cackles; either the TV or the radio will be on.

It is a house full of old people, but also a house alive. Jesus could be running off to his tennis game, or to his job (in his early 80s!) as an insurance-company doctor tasked with giving physicals to new applicants; he might be at the piano, or quietly engaged in the spiritual study he has devoted much of the past two decades to, seeing no contradiction whatsoever between his philosophical explorations and the materialist moorings of his mind. The children or the nephews and nieces might be coming over in a great flood through the door. There is always an old comrade from the HMB days visiting with his friends, or perhaps a young student, scholar, or seminarian not yet born when Peping flew off to Prague. They come in search of answers to questions about a past they never saw. The Lavas and GY are always happy to oblige; it will be a chance, for them, to argue once again and refine old statements and positions. Now and then the news of another death — no longer from a Japanese or constabulary rifle, but inexorable old age — creeps in through the door at Malapantao; no matter; these people have seen death all their lives, and stared it down. Their own memories may have begun to blur around the edges — What was that name? Where was that place? What exactly did you say? — but they have not forgotten how to laugh, and can still gather around the piano for a hearty round of song.

The kind of monuments the Lava brothers may have wanted never came to being. If they dreamed of nothing more and nothing less than establishing a communist-led regime in the Philippines within their lifetimes, then the Lavas have clearly failed.

In the half-century after the war and the apex of the Huks' power in the early 1950s, the Philippines has gone through nine administrations — including the 20-year dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos — all of them beholden in some degree to American patronage. Paquito and Peping Lava's

Paquito and Peping Lava's idiosyncratically sympathetic reading of Marcos as an anti-imperialist never caught on, and indeed Marcos in his totality would be roundly repudiated by the Filipino middle class.

idiosyncratically sympathetic reading of Marcos as an anti-imperialist never caught on, and indeed Marcos in his totality would be roundly repudiated by the Filipino middle class and dropped by his erstwhile sponsors at EDSA in 1986.

The Communist Party itself would splinter into two, then into several more factions, each claiming a monopoly of ideological correctness, even and perhaps especially at a time of receding fortunes for the Left, nearly everywhere in the world. The

largest and strongest claimant to the mantle of the original Party has been Jose Ma Sison's 're-established' and Mao-influenced CPP which, with its military arm, the New People's Army (NPA), would pose a real threat to Marcos' 'New Society' and remain a thorn in the side of the Aquino and Ramos governments. But even Sison's party would break up into dissident factions.

The emergence of more legal alternatives — such as the hundreds of nongovernment organizations (NGOs) that have sprung up all over the Philippines since Marcos' fall in 1986 — has defused much of the moral and material power of the old Left, attracting both experienced cadres and fresh, idealistic recruits. In the universities, Marxism has been domesticated into just another professional discipline, with increasingly fewer adherents. Few students know or care about the decades before their birth, and the time of the Huks might as well be Roman history to the young.

But the fight for social and economic justice goes on, albeit in other and myriad forms, and in this continuing struggle, the legacy of the Lavas continues to be manifest: in every exceptional young person or intellectual who chooses public service and political engagement over a life of certain comfort.

This, ultimately, was what the Lavas succeeded in doing: they gave the educated Filipino middle class — the *ilustrados* of their time and ours — another option besides the blind acceptance of things as they have always been. They redefined personal excellence, and infused the personal and the professional with the political imperative. They promoted the entry of the middle class into the mainstream of radical, mass-based politics, and reintroduced a whole new generation of Filipino intellectuals to the revolutionary ideals of 1896. To workers and peasants, they offered proof of and hope for solidarity in political action across and among social classes. For those they inspired — and despite their many errors, shortcomings, and imperfections — they helped to turn the ideal into the commonplace.

When Adeodato chose education over religion for his son Vicente, he was making what seemed, by his best lights, a practical decision better suited to the rationalism of the incoming century. Even so he could have little anticipated that education would lead Vicente to science, and from there to the scientific study of society. Vicente and his brothers would then lead a line of critical inquiry that would take them and their contemporaries from opposing fascism, beneath the rising specter of war, to a lifelong struggle against imperialism in all its manifestations.

The example of the Lavas encouraged others of their time — such as the writers IP Soliongco, Jose Lansang, and, later, Renato Constantino and Hernando Abaya — to fill the void in critical and nationalist inquiry that half a century of American rule had managed to create in the hearts and minds of the Filipino people. Thus did decades of resistance to colonial and imperialist domination come full circle and engage whole new generations: the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of 1896, an epochal event whose spirit was kept alive by a family and a movement that learned and espoused Marxism, but were no less Filipinos for the effort.

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