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## Taruc's Spiritual Pilgrimage

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## *Taruc's Spiritual Pilgrimage\**

I WOULD like to emphasize, in reviewing Luis M. Taruc's second book, *He Who Rides the Tiger*, that this is the story of his spiritual pilgrimage, or rather his return journey from Communism to the faith of his birth—Catholicism. The book was originally titled *Born Again* which, I believe, was more apt than the present title because it provided a striking contrast to Taruc's first book, *Born of the People*, which was written in 1949 when he was still the commander-in-chief of the Huk rebel army and a member of the powerful politburo of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

But somewhere along the way the ineluctable exigencies of the cold war seemed to have taken the upper hand, and the old title was changed, obviously to serve as a stark reminder and warning to others who, in their naiveté, might fall into the error of riding the "tiger"—i.e., getting involved in the communist movement—and eventually end up in its entrails. Contemporary history is replete with cases of the communist "revolution" devouring its own sons. Nonetheless, I do realize that having been published in the United States, and doubtless with an eye to a worldwide audience of diverse faiths and political beliefs quite different from our own, the present title is more catchy and evidently more intriguing, in spite of the fact that the author, as I know him, would have preferred the old title since he had not actually renounced his religion but merely let it "lapse" while he was identified with the Communist Party.

Having been expelled from the party in 1954, for consciously and deliberately ignoring and even defying its "adventurist" and "leftist" policies, Taruc, who gave up to the authorities shortly after his expulsion, felt that there were no more obstacles standing in the way of reviving his "lapsed"

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\* *HE WHO RIDES THE TIGER: The Story of an Asian Guerrilla Leader.* By Luis M. Taruc. Foreword by Douglas Hyde. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1967; New York: Frederick A. Praeger, publishers, 1967, vii, 188 pp.

Catholicism. To him, understandably, this was the most important event after his break with the party—a break which he knew was coming sooner or later. It is in this light that he must be judged if we are to do justice to a fellow Christian, a brother Filipino who is truly a man of his times.

Douglas Hyde, who wrote the foreword to the book and had edited and put it into final shape before sending it to the publisher, admits:

Above all, this is the story of a spiritual pilgrimage and, because of the circumstances in which it was written, the reader may observe the progress as he makes his way through the book. The book is not only the story of a conversion from Communism to Christianity and democracy, it is part of the conversion itself. (Foreword, p. xx.)

In his prison cell, even while he was kept in isolation from other political prisoners, Taruc's "spiritual growth was impressive," Hyde notes, although "his political thought had not kept pace with his spiritual development." An earlier evidence of his spiritual searching may be gleaned from a visit by a Catholic priest, as reported in the *NCWC News Service*, the official Catholic news service in America, who had an intimate talk with Taruc. According to the report, Taruc had confided to the priest that he was "having difficulty in accepting the atheism of communism." This was in 1954, in the early period of his confinement after his surrender. A long-drawn-out trial before the Court of First Instance of Pampanga followed the termination of his first political case involving rebellion to which he had pleaded guilty, and even before he received his second sentence, as Hyde observed, Taruc had already been "born again."

But let Taruc tell us of his spiritual development in his own words:

Years of prison life have provided me with plenty of time for reflection. I have been able to examine my beliefs and have tried to learn from my mistakes. I have asked myself where my comrades and I went wrong. This in turn has led me to clarify my approach to God, the world, and mankind. In the process I have gained inner peace.

. . .

Yes, I have been a Communist and yet originally I was not a Communist but a Socialist. But the Communist and the Socialist parties of the Philippines merged, in the days of the United Front. As I was then the general secretary of the Socialist Party of the Philippines, I became automatically one of the leaders of the Communists, too. The long-range purpose of this merger did not succeed. Most of the Socialist Party leaders and most of the rank-and-file members did not become ideological Communists. I, for one, was never completely won over to toeing the Stalinist line. I was never "Bolshevized," and I never accepted completely the atheism that is fundamental to Communist belief. Instead, I dissented from what I did not like. On many occasions, I nearly precipitated a split in the merged party. (Pp. 6-7.)

Incidentally, I am using, for my review purposes, Taruc's own copy of the book—an advanced complimentary copy from the publishers that arrived here some three months ago, which he, in turn, gave to his spiritual adviser and friend of long standing, Mons. Francisco Avendaño, D.P., formerly chief of chaplains, Philippine Army. In his dedication Taruc told the good father: "With my love and respect, and eternal gratitude for your deep understanding, patience and loving kindness as my spiritual adviser for the past 13 years. With you always—in the Sacred Heart, Luis M. Taruc."

That is Taruc as I have known him since 1945.

## II

Written in a simple, straightforward style—as simple indeed as the author himself who came from a sturdy peasant stock—the present work is the exact antithesis to his *Born of the People*, which was ghostwritten by the American communist, William Pomeroy. Gone are the obvious rationalizations of the shortcomings of the Communist Party which were only too evident in the first book, a fact which he could not have avoided, even if he had wanted to, since he had been built up by the party as the "symbol" of the Filipino resistance movement against the Japanese, and later as the "leader" of the struggle for national liberation from remnants of Western

colonialism and/or imperialism. Having decisively broken away from the party, Taruc, as expected, this time lets loose his pent-up emotions and grievances, picturing in all their sordid details what actually happened inside the "inner sanctum" of the party, how the party secretariat tried to make a marionette out of him in his interview with Manuel P. Manahan, then a newspaperman representing the *Bagong-Buhay* and the *Manila Times*, and finally how he disregarded all party instructions and spoke his mind on matters which he believed were too important for the life of the country and the people to trifle with, even in the high name of the party and the "revolution."

That interview, Taruc reveals, turned out to be the last straw, for barely one month later, in August 1950, he was surreptitiously removed from his post as commander-in-chief of the Huk rebel army. So swiftly and underhandedly had the axe fallen on his neck that, while "PB" (Political Bureau) supervisors in all the Recos or Regional Committees scattered throughout the country had been informed about it, he knew of his removal only in November, during the military conference in Reco 3, deep in the Sierra Madre jungle off western Bulacan. By this time, on October 18, 1950, the old secretariat, including the politburo, had been captured in a spectacular round-up of communist suspects in Manila and suburbs by military intelligence operatives. When, years later, Taruc was put in prison together with Jose Lava, the former general secretary of the party, the two had a face-to-face confrontation, but the latter refused to tell why he had not informed Taruc of his removal from the Huk high command, saying merely that his younger brother, Jesus, the new general secretary of the party, was "much more capable" to lead the revolutionary struggle. Taruc, however, deduced that the real reason for his ouster was that the secretariat could not afford to have a man like him (Taruc) in that key position who did not believe in the "victory" so glowingly painted by the party leaders.

In addition to the obvious "double-dealing" of party leaders, Taruc makes a startling revelation of the ineptitude of the party leadership, particularly the captured "politburo"

operating clandestinely in Manila. In words bristling with sarcasm Taruc says:

Only a week earlier, the members of the secretariat had boasted of their super-intelligence facilities, infiltration success, and foolproof security methods. They had continually cautioned all lower echelons and cadres to be aware of the necessity of maximum vigilance and secrecy of movements. To drive home that point, they issued mimeographed reproductions of Stalin's *Mastering Bolshevism* to every cadre and party organ. Indeed, in that most delicate stage of the revolution, the party demanded of every member, cadre, and organ a fanatical degree of devotion, to be manifested in unrelenting class-conscious vigilance, in determination, courage, and total self-sacrifice if need be. That was what they had been hammering into the party rank and file. (Pp. 90-91.)

That is not all. Taruc likewise discloses the corrupting effect of power—or power that was yet to become a reality along with the victory of the “revolution.” In a brief paragraph revealing the true character of the men who ran the party at the time, Taruc writes:

But after their capture, I could not help recalling some of the unofficial reports I had received from my couriers returning from Manila. They had observed that some of the key men in the secretariat acted as though they were already “somebody”; that those comrades were talking big, flushed with power—corrupted by power before they had it. While mouthing idealistic principles, these power-obsessed leaders were doing the opposite. They had forgotten that to master anything, even Bolshevism, one must first master himself. (P. 91.)

Before the mass round-up of communist leaders in Manila, the old secretariat had planned to slip quietly into the Sierra Madre to attend the military conference which had been called to assess the capabilities of the Huk rebel army for the planned seizure of power within the next two years, or on or about November 7, 1951. But the capture of the politburo caused drastic alteration of the plan, and the military conferees, who constituted the majority of the second-front politburo in the field (“PB out”), merely decided to call a central committee conference in February 1951.

In January of the previous year the politburo had declared the existence of a “revolutionary situation” in the Phil-

ippines following the presidential election of 1949, an election characterized by large scale terrorism and frauds, precipitating the abortive Medrano uprising in Batangas and sporadic clashes between armed bands and government forces in other parts of the country. Taruc did not believe in the existence of a "revolutionary situation" at the time. He was in the best position to know because he had been assigned to Reco 2, consisting of the critical provinces of Pampanga, Tarlac, Zambales, and Bataan, the area where the party had its strongest mass base and military force. He saw little or no evidence of the readiness of the "reserves of the revolution," i.e., the peasantry, to support the vanguard or Communist Party should it be thrown into the revolutionary struggle for the seizure of state power.

Taruc, however, by his own admission, did not possess the necessary intellectual and ideological competence to successfully challenge the party leadership, particularly Jesus Lava. To his dismay the central committee conference ended up with more "adventurist" resolutions, including those establishing provisional revolutionary governments in towns and barrios where the communists could depend on the loyalty of the masses; creating peasant committees for the seizure and distribution of the big landed estates to the landless farmers; setting up revolutionary workers' councils in factories; levying revolutionary taxes on the people; issuing "script" money in lieu of the present currency or legal tender; and converting the HMB (Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan) or People's Liberation Army from guerrilla to regular army.

None of the above mentioned resolutions, according to Taruc, could be implemented in any Reco at the time, proving to all and sundry that they had been based on an erroneous appraisal of the objective conditions obtaining in the country. He therefore attributes the failure of the communist "revolution" or what is popularly known as the Huk rebellion to the following wrong conclusions and decisions by the party leadership under Lava:

1. That there existed in the Philippines a "revolutionary situation" which, in the face of the international and national situations, would

inevitably culminate in a "revolutionary crisis" within two years (1951);

2. That the liberation movement must, during 1950 and 1951, complete an intensive two-year program of preparation for the seizure of power by armed struggle, and that all other tasks must be geared to this one supreme effort;

3. That we must announce and define our political objective and program similar to that of Mao Tse-tung's "New People's Democracy";

4. That the Communist Party leadership within the liberation movement must be publicized and projected at every possible opportunity;

5. That we must undertake the armed uprising on our own and be prepared to "go it alone." Consequently, we should (and did) expose our former Democratic Alliance and Nacionalista Party allies as "having recoiled and turned traitors to the people."

6. That we must reorganize and rename the Huk to make it conform with the demands of the new political situation (we now call it HMB, the Tagalog initials for Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan or PAL—People's Army of Liberation); and

7. That we must impose military discipline, not only on the party and the Huk, but on all other mass organizations "led" by the CPP. (P. 73.)

### III

To this day the Communist Party leadership would not admit that they erred in declaring the existence of a "revolutionary situation" in and around 1949. Nor would they concede that the "revolutionary flow" emanating from the 1949 elections had started to recede or ebb after the arrest of the politburo the following year; indeed, the whole incident, which has no parallel in the history of any other communist party in the world, was apparently dismissed by the party leadership as of little consequence because in the central committee conference in February 1951 several resolutions based on the existence of a "revolutionary situation" were approved over the feeble objection raised by the Taruc brothers (Luis and Peregrino).

Upon what objective factors did the Communist Party leadership base its assessment that a "revolutionary situa-



tion" had arisen after the 1949 elections? Jose Lava, in the enlarged politburo conference in January 1950, months before his arrest together with other top communist leaders, cited the worsening economic recession in the United States which was aggravated by the victory of the communist revolution in China. Taruc, who was present in this conference, makes this vivid description of Lava's attempt to swing support to his thesis affirming the existence of a "revolutionary situation":

Citing impressive statistics taken from economic reports by "trusted and capable researchers" and subjecting these reports to the laws of dialectic development, Lava painted a picture of an impending crisis in the United States. The United States, he stressed, was the leader of the remaining imperialist powers, and a recession there would be felt by all. He gave special emphasis to the nature of capitalism and imperialism and backed it up with profuse quotations from Lenin and Stalin. The Lenin-Stalin dictum that "imperialism means war" was trotted out to clinch his argument that the recession in the United States—which, he said, was fast developing into a crisis—could be countered by the imperialists only by launching a major war, which would surely develop into World War III. This was the classical Marxist approach to an impending revolutionary crisis.

Either way, war or no war, said Lava, a serious economic crisis in the United States was certain to affect the Philippines. And this would be most favorable to the liberation movement—and to the rise of the Communist Party. 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 deteriorating international and national situations, would surely develop into a national revolutionary crisis. This could only mean that the Communists' "moment of opportunity" was at hand. (Pp. 69-70.)

Evidently, what Lava mentioned as a "revolutionary situation" was merely a "revolutionary mood"—a temporary and passing affair typical of disgruntled elements among the masses. Lenin in his writings had repeatedly warned communist decision-makers against basing party policies on "revolutionary moods" alone which may or may not develop into a "revolutionary situation," let alone a "revolutionary crisis." To prove that Lava's assessment of a "revolutionary

situation" fell short of the classic Marxist definition of the term, Taruc culls the following quotation from Lenin's *"Left-Wing" Communism, An Infantile Disorder*:

The fundamental law of revolution, confirmed by all revolutions and particularly by all three Russian revolutions in the twentieth century, is as follows: It is not sufficient for revolution that the exploited and oppressed masses understand the impossibility of living in the old way and demand changes; for revolution it is necessary that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way. Only when the "lower classes" *do not want* the old and when the "upper classes" *cannot continue in the old way*, then only can the revolution be victorious. This truth may be expressed in other words: Revolution is impossible without a national crisis affecting both the exploited and the exploiters. It follows that for revolution it is essential, first, that a majority of the workers (or at least a majority of the class-conscious, thinking, politically active workers) should fully understand the necessity for revolution and be ready to sacrifice their lives for it; secondly, that the ruling classes be in a state of governmental crisis which draws even the most backward masses into politics. (P. 79.)

Taruc believes that this original error concerning the existence of a "revolutionary situation" was further compounded by the decision to project the Communist Party as the "leader" of the national liberation struggle, thus alienating the support of the nationalist elements, notably the intellectuals and Filipino capitalists who were likewise suffering from the competition put up by alien vested interests in the country. This meant that the party would "go it alone," a serious blunder which, according to Taruc, might end in disastrous failure. He was for maintaining "a broad, democratic, genuine united front which would embrace all our countrymen who loved peace, freedom and democracy." He insisted that "our old Democratic Alliance and Nacionalista Party allies were still true and sincere Filipinos; in differing from us they were only trying to be realistic and prudent in their own way."

"But all my dissenting opinions were defeated," Taruc ruefully adds.

#### IV

Another question of pivotal importance in the Communist Party was the question of what policy to pursue in the face

of the "long and bitter struggle" confronting the party and its mass organizations, particularly the Huk rebel army. The "seizure of power" policy laid down by the central committee conference of February 1951 was temporarily set aside as the leadership and rank-and-file braced up for a "protracted war" reminiscent of the situation which confronted the Chinese communists after they had retreated to their Yen-an base in 1927.

In view of the changed international situation characterized by Soviet Russia's call for "peaceful co-existence" among nations of diverse, even conflicting, ideologies, Taruc on Sept. 1, 1952 decided to issue a "Call for Peace" in the form of a leaflet. This was intended as a response to persistent efforts of Dr. Emilio Cortez, who was later to become a congressman representing the second district of Pampanga, in trying to effect a peaceful settlement of the armed conflict in Central Luzon. In issuing his "Call for Peace" Taruc was convinced that there was no outstanding problem in the country that could not be solved by peaceful negotiation. Here is the gist of his peace call:

Beloved countrymen:

The issue of peace overshadows all other issues in the world today. In the face of the mounting world crisis, mankind is drifting steadily toward another yet more horrible war.... It becomes the duty of every thinking man and woman to work actively for peace....

Peace is the first and most fundamental necessity of human society. Without peace, all talk of freedom, democracy, and progress will be meaningless.... Peace is the issue that transcends all partisan considerations—political, economic, religious, and social. Therefore, I call upon all my countrymen, regardless of political or religious belief, economic or social status...to join in a national movement for peace. (P. 122.)

Taruc issued his "Call for Peace" while bivouacked in a secluded portion of the Candaba swamps in Pampanga. Some twenty miles away to the west, in the jungle of the Zambales-Pampanga mountain ranges overlooking the American naval base at Subic Bay, his younger brother, Peregrino, had finished the draft of a memorandum entitled "New Situation, New Tasks," which also had peace as its main theme. The two

brothers had not seen each other for months, but it was amazing that they were both thinking along the same line: peace. When finally they met in December 1952 in the headquarters of Field Command No. 21 of Reco 2, in Mount Arayat, they decided to use the two party documents—"Call for Peace" and "New Situation, New Tasks"—as the basis of their "OED Memo" to be forwarded to the party secretariat then holed up in the Sierra Madre jungles off Laguna province. The "OED Memo" asked the secretariat to adopt the "peace policy."

The memorandum immediately elicited a reply from the general secretary, Jesus Lava, who wrote: "It is a fortunate coincidence that we have the same opinions and perspective on the present political situation." The Taruc brothers were greatly encouraged by the reply, but a few weeks later, they received a supplementary memorandum, this time signed not by Lava but by the secretariat as the "leading organ" of the party. The secretariat not only bluntly dismissed the "OED Memo" as "pointless" but also condemned it for containing "factionalist, careerist, deviationist, defeatist tendencies, and the desire to surrender."

In place of the "peace policy" suggested by the Taruc brothers and another high-ranking party leader named "Dading," the secretariat issued the "anti-war policy." At first glance it would seem that there was no essential difference between the "peace policy" and the "anti-war policy"; but a careful reading of both would immediately reveal that while the "peace policy" favored a shift in policy from armed to peaceful, legal and parliamentary struggle, the "anti-war policy" was for the intensification of the armed struggle. It was the thinking of the secretariat, according to Truc that

once more, another and more terrible world war was threatening to break out but that it was not inevitable. The imperialist powers, led by the United States, the reasoning went, were on the verge of a very serious international economic crisis. Ordinarily, the only solution known to the imperialist powers for such a crisis was to launch a major war. Such a war might now turn into a third world war. The crisis and the war that might grow out of it would

deeply affect the Philippines, because our country was tied to "Uncle Sam's" apron strings. The party policy, which the secretariat advanced for that international and national situation, was summed up in its "anti-war" and "anti-imperialist warmongers" slogans. (P. 129.)

Taruc discloses that the party secretariat rejected the positive program that he and his brother had put forward. Lava and his group dismissed their call for a peace settlement, for a return to the parliamentary struggle, and to a genuine, broad, united front. They even considered the proposal a "betrayal of the party, the people, and the revolution." This being the attitude of the secretariat toward them, it did not take long for the party axe to fall on their necks.

Peregrino, Taruc's younger brother, was the first to be expelled from the party for violation of the party discipline. Then came Luis Taruc himself who was at first suspended from the party, but later on, as the ideological conflict revived long smouldering distrust and animosities, he was "tried and convicted *in absentia*," and finally expelled from the party.

## V

Why did Taruc surrender?

This is a question that has intrigued many people here and abroad who had been following, from reports in the newspapers, his record as the leader of the Huk resistance movement, as congressman from the second district of his home province of Pampanga, and as the commander-in-chief of the Huk rebel army that came close to capturing state power in 1950.

True, he had serious differences with the Communist Party leadership under the Lava brothers (Jose and Jesus). It was equally true that he had been expelled from the party. But Taruc, the veteran guerrilla leader that he was, could have stayed indefinitely in the field, secure in the thought that the peasant masses, who had known him since before the war, and loved him as no other peasant leader had been loved before, would continue supporting him, shielding him from his enemies, and even preventing his capture by the authorities.

Indicative of Taruc's immense popularity with the masses was the result of the election when he ran for congressman in his province: 39,000 votes cast for him as against 10,000 for his opponent who belonged to the victorious Liberal Party that captured the presidency for Manuel Roxas. Taruc won the greatest majority ever recorded in the history of Pampanga despite the fact that he had not delivered a single campaign speech in his own district.

Taruc, after his expulsion from the party, could have organized a new party or mobilized a sizable army from his trusted followers, and remained a force to be reckoned with by friends and foes alike. But he did none of these; instead, he chose to surrender—"in the Christian sense, not in the communist sense." Taruc adds that he "had had enough of Bolshevism and all its works." What else had prompted him to give up his hunted life?

Among my many motives for surrender there entered a very personal factor. All through the years, my mother had continued to believe in the goodness of her son. For nearly a month before I came down from the hills, I had heard her voice, almost hourly, urging me over the government radio to accept the government's proposals, to give myself up and rejoin her and my loved ones. From that day to this, she has never failed to visit me in the various prisons where I have been kept. This has often been done at great sacrifice to herself and despite her more than seventy years.

I believe that our people were weary of bloodshed and war and that there were enough sincere and patriotic leaders capable of setting aside their personal and class interests for the good of our nation, men who would work for a truly free, democratic, and prosperous Philippines. (Pp. 137-138.)

## VI

The late Gregoria Calma—"Liza" to her many friends in the movement—was the third woman in Taruc's life. She died on a Good Friday morning, April 11, 1953, in the fastnesses of Sierra Madre, one of countless victims of the fratricidal strife in Central Luzon. She had wanted to come along with her husband enroute to Cagayan, but her constitution was so frail he was afraid she would not be able to make the trip.

She clung to him in a last parting embrace, whispering, "Pop, I prefer to leave now and to walk all the way with you." Taruc, the loving husband, merely kissed her and told her that it was best she remained behind. One hour later, after Taruc had left the camp, government troops arrived and subjected it to an intense barrage of rifle fire. Liza fell.

In prison, Taruc recalled a memorable interlude with Liza the day before she was "sacrificed on the altar of intolerance by the contending forces, each blinded by its narrow class and partisan interests."

But most of all I remembered the last words Liza had spoken to me before she died so young and so tragically. On the eve of her death, she had told me how she longed for the day when we could be married in church and could go to Mass and take the sacraments together. While in prison, I had learned that in her dying hour she ignored those who wished to interrogate her, refusing to be distracted from her prayers. She knew she was about to die, and she prepared herself for death as a Christian should. Her last words were a supplication to God and to Our Lady not only for herself but for me, which moved even the battle-hardened soldiers who were present at the time. (Pp. 178-179.)

Taruc also mentions some good Christian lay missionaries who visited him regularly in prison and helped him bear his lot. Prison life became almost unbearable for him especially when he was confined in a cell along with the members of the politburo. He felt spiritually suffocated.

Then, as if sent by Providence, came another powerful influence—Douglas Hyde, another ex-Communist, who came to see me in November, 1957. It happened that I had already read his autobiography, *I Believed*. He helped me sweep away my remaining reluctance to return to the Church. We agreed that I should go to Christmas Mass that year. I did, despite the taunts and ridicule of my old comrades of the politburo.

As I knelt, I felt as though I were surrounded with love and tenderness. It was like the first meeting with my mother after my surrender, when she embraced me and wept on my shoulder. I felt that my mother, the Church received me without reproach, with nothing but love. I felt I had come home. (Pp. 179-180.)

Taruc was born again.

ALFREDO B. SAULO