

# Philippine ex-left joins attack on Supreme Court

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On January 27, Philippine congressional representative Walden Bello, a member of the pseudo-left party Akbayan, filed a complaint with the office of the Ombudsman against Philippine Supreme Court Spokesperson Midas Marquez. The complaint demanded the repayment of \$US200,000 to the World Bank.

Bello established an international reputation in anti-globalization circles for his critique of the World Bank, particularly with the publication of his book *Development Debacle: The World Bank in the Philippines* in 1982. That he is now filing a court case in the Philippines on behalf of the World Bank is striking to say the least.

The complaint against Marquez is part of a political witch hunt by President Benigno Aquino against former President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and her supporters. Arroyo is facing charges of corruption. Her close ally, Supreme Court Chief Justice Renato Corona, has been impeached and his trial is entering its fourth week. At the forefront of this anti-democratic assault are the various parties of the Philippine ‘left.’

Supreme Court spokesperson Marquez has been at the center of support for the beleaguered chief justice. He has led rallies of justices in support of Corona, and organized a one-day strike of the entire judicial branch to protest Aquino’s assault on the court. In other words, he is a thorn in the side of the Aquino administration.

A confidential World Bank memo was leaked to the Philippine press on January 15, the day before the beginning of the impeachment trial. The press reports

stated that the memo was regarding misuse of funds loaned by the World Bank to the Philippine judiciary under the auspices of the Judicial Support Reform Program (JRSP), initiated in 2003.

What emerged over the subsequent days was that the memo was a routine preliminary finding issued as a formality by the World Bank to a very select number of Philippine government offices, including the office of the president. The report alleged that 0.5 percent of the loan had been mishandled—spent on ineligible transactions—and the World Bank would be requesting that the misspent funds be repaid, amounting to \$200,000.

The World Bank issued a statement denying leaking the report to the press. It emerged that the office of president, which received the report on December 28, 2011, had waited until the eve of the trial and then redacted the document to play up the guilt of the Supreme Court and released it to the press under the phony email account [worldbankreport@gmail.com](mailto:worldbankreport@gmail.com). Aquino issued a press statement, saying, “We can now say there is an independent foreign party that has complained about the way the Supreme Court runs thing.”

The president called on “someone to file charges against Marquez with the office of the Ombudsman.” Akbayan sprang into action. Walden Bello filed charges on behalf of the Aquino administration, demanding the repayment to the World Bank and the removal of Marquez from office.

Marquez invoked the principle of the separation of powers and condemned the rising “dictatorship” of the

Aquino administration. Bello responded with the language of a right-wing thug, denouncing Marquez for “hiding behind the constitution.”

Akbayan’s strategy had been formulated with Aquino before the beginning of the trial. Joel Rocamora, an Akbayan leader who heads Aquino’s Presidential Anti-Poverty Commission, wrote on January 7: “Since, short of a coup, you can’t remove other problematic justices, you remove the head. It’s not a question of how many justices PNoy [Aquino] appoints; the more important step is to secure our leadership that does not behave as if it were part of the opposition.”

Rocamora observed that it might be difficult to obtain a guilty verdict against the chief justice from the Senate. He advised what amounts to blackmail, saying that he would not bet on “Corona riding out exposé of expensive Makati penthouses, corruption charges against his wife, even rumors of sexual harassment cases. Resignation or conviction, either way, Corona will go.”

Rival groups on the Philippine left have played an equally despicable role. Bayan Muna, the leading party list organization of the legal front of the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines, would not be outdone. Bayan Muna representatives Casino and Colmenares filed a resolution in Congress directing the House Committee on Good Government and Public Accountability to investigate Supreme Court spokesperson Marquez.

Walden Bello made his reputation on the basis of his critique of the World Bank; he is now using World Bank documents to carry out an anti-democratic assault on the Philippine judiciary on behalf of the interests of a section of the Philippine ruling class. In doing so, he is also backing the interests of US imperialism.

Aquino’s move against the chief justice is bound up with political infighting in the country’s ruling elites. Prior to his impeachment, Corona, with the majority of the Supreme Court justices concurring, consistently struck down initiatives by the Aquino administration against Arroyo as unconstitutional. When Aquino moved to have Arroyo arrested, the Supreme Court

reversed a former ruling regarding Hacienda Luisita, the massive sugar plantation of the president’s own Cojuangco-Aquino family, ordering the redistribution of the land. Aquino responded by having Corona impeached.

The Aquino-Arroyo feud has more fundamental motivations, however. The past decade—the decade of Arroyo’s rule—has seen the explosive growth of the Chinese economy. Arroyo began to reorient Philippine economic and political ties away from the United States and toward China. Washington has backed Aquino’s prosecution of Arroyo, and has sought, and won, the support of his administration as a proxy for US interests against China in the region.

A group of visiting US congressmen met with Aquino during the first week of the impeachment trial and declared American support for his anti-corruption efforts, i.e., the prosecution of Arroyo and Corona. They stated that they could “attest to the fact that this administration is doing all it can to right the wrongs of the past.” During the bilateral talks in Washington of last week, which negotiated an expanded US military presence in the Philippines, one of the quid pro quo items that the US promised Aquino was to assist his “anti-corruption institutions in increasing their ability to gather and analyze evidence.”

Like ex-lefts around the world, Bello, along with Akbayan as a whole, has integrated himself into his country’s political establishment. Just as the former World Bank critic is now filing a case on its behalf, so Bello, previously a vociferous opponent of American imperialism, is now one of the most vocal advocates of asserting Philippine rights in the South China Sea—in line with the Obama’s administration’s confrontation with China.



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